

“TO AUTHOR HERSELF AS SOMEONE EMPOWERED”:
HISTORICAL PRINT CULTURES AS A MODEL OF PUBLIC
EDUCATION FOR QUEER GIRLS

by

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This thesis proposes a set of guidelines for best practices regarding the language arts education of queer girls, built from a theoretical, historical, and analytical basis. This work draws from the theories surrounding gender and sexual orientation discrimination, such as intersectionality, heteronormativity, and social justice education. I argue for the use of historical lesbian-feminist print cultures as a model for positive queer girl literacy, including a case study of Ann Arbor’s *Leaping Lesbian* journal (1977-1980). An analysis of popular middle grades novels reveals and disrupts the heteronormative and patriarchal narratives within them. Based on this background, Chapter 5 contains guidelines for classroom teachers wishing to improve their practices and to have a positive impact on queer girls in middle grades language arts classes.

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Introduction

As a bisexual woman and a future teacher, I am concerned that the American educational system is both disadvantageous for and unconcerned with the needs of queer female students. In many public schools across the U.S., non-inclusive curricula cultures of bullying and harassment, pedagogical practices, and discriminatory discipline practices teach a hidden curriculum that queer women and girls are unwelcome and unvalued.

This thesis project therefore examines how social justice theory and LGBTQ history informs the intersectional and inclusive education of queer girls. In Chapter 1, I explicate the social justice and educational theories that form the foundation of this thesis. Then I illustrate the challenges facing LGBTQ girls in mainstream American schools through the lens of these theories. Chapter 2 provides an overview of modern legislation and programming intended to improve education for LGBTQ and/or female students, analyzing the limitations and benefits of each attempt at reformation. In Chapter 3, I analyze historical lesbian-feminist print cultures, arguing that these print cultures served lesbian and bisexual women and girls as supportive forms of community education and identity development. I also provide a case study of the lesbian-feminist periodical *The Leaping Lesbian* and argue for this periodical as a model for supporting queer girls in middle school English language arts classes. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of heteronormative and patriarchal narratives in common middle school readings.

These chapters provide the foundation of a cumulative creative project: a set of practical guidelines for introducing, analyzing, and creating feminist and LGBTQ-

inclusive texts in traditional classrooms. These guidelines are valuable resources for public school teachers who wish to maintain an inclusive, safe, and critically aware classroom environment while also: (1) introducing queer-inclusive literature; (2) inviting their female-identified queer students to share their experiences and develop their identity within formal education spaces; and (3) facilitating student creation of personally meaningful queer-inclusive texts such as short stories and poems.

Scope

My creative project is focused for use in American middle school English language arts classes. I have chosen to focus on language arts classes because of the rich history that illustrates the power of writing and community-produced texts in LGBTQ education (see Chapter 2). Additionally, middle school is an appropriate age range for this thesis because early adolescence is an important time of identity development for all youth, perhaps even more for LGBTQ youth who lack social support systems for identity formation (Kommer, 2006; Paechter, 1998; Rofes, 2005). Moreover, middle-grade students generally are sufficiently competent readers to identify and analyze heterosexist and sexist themes and narratives.

Because the LGBTQ community is diverse and complex, it is important to limit this study in several ways. For example, while I acknowledge the need to incorporate transgender women and gender non-binary people within a larger discussion of educational inequity, these individuals face myriad structural inequalities that do not apply to other queer females and which merit attention far beyond the limitations of a

single thesis. Thus my work focuses on cisgender¹ women and girls (as well as those who suffer from misogynist power structures because they are *perceived* as cisgender females). For the sake of concision, I use terms such as “queer women and girls,” “queer female students,” and “gay and bisexual female students” to refer only to cisgender women who are gay, bisexual, or otherwise attracted to individuals of the same gender.

Importance

This research is important for two major reasons. First, public schools are responsible for serving all of America’s youth. If schools provide some students with the resources and information they need for success while depriving other students of these services because of their identity, then public education fails them. For example, schools serve straight male students by providing them with literature that presents straight boys and men in myriad roles and identities, whereas queer women and girls gain access to narrow, if any, roles in school-assigned literature. This study presents specific ways to improve the education of queer women and girls, and thereby make American public education more equitable.

Second, proper use of my guidelines will facilitate student empowerment as change-makers. Public schools maintain structures of heteronormativity and patriarchy, meaning schools socialize queer girls in much the same way as they do straight males. (Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 80; see more in Chapter 1).

Educators can expand the strict limitations of gender identity for all students, including

¹ Cisgender refers to individuals whose gender identity conforms with their biological sex (as opposed to transgender or gender non-binary individuals).

straight and queer boys facing rigid constructs of masculinity, when they address the unique educational needs of queer, female-identified students (Pascoe, 2012). My guidelines empower teachers to engage their students in dialogues surrounding gender and sexuality, to use queer texts to engage all students regardless of their sexuality, to transform their classrooms into spaces for safe and respectful engagement with issues of identity and power structures, and ultimately to empower *all* their students to become informed allies of LGBTQ youth.

Chapter 1: Educational Inequity and Theoretical Framework

Literature and Theory

My project is inherently interdisciplinary, based in social theory, history, and literary analysis that contextualize and support the guidelines presented in Chapter 5. In the following section, therefore, I provide scholarly background of social justice theory and social justice education. Then I describe the two primary systems that oppress queer women and girls: patriarchy and heteronormativity. Finally, I discuss how these structures function in American public schools.

Critical Social Justice

This thesis builds on critical social justice theory and social justice pedagogy. This school of thought recognizes the “*stratified* (i.e., divided and unequal)” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. xvii) nature of American society. According to social justice theory, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and class are culturally constructed concepts that divide people into hierarchically valued social groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. xvii). Groups at the top of this hierarchy (e.g. men, heterosexuals, White people, cisgender people) benefit from the exploitation, dehumanization, and devaluation of groups at the bottom (e.g. women, LGBTQ individuals, people of color). Systems of oppression enforce these hierarchies through institutional practices, policies, and ideologies that naturalize and normalize the supremacy of privileged groups over oppressed groups. Members of dominant groups gain benefits such as higher self-esteem and entitlement, financial prosperity and upward mobility, accurate and relatable media representation, and greater access to resources such as safe neighborhoods,

quality education, and health care. (Crenshaw, 1991; Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

The cultural fabrics of history, dominant ideology (or hegemony), and institutional practices normalize oppression in such a way that it becomes invisible both to privileged and oppressed individuals. From infancy, children learn the spoken and unspoken rules of their culture in a process called socialization. Children learn and internalize oppressive ideologies from ubiquitous socializing forces such as school lessons, parental values, TV shows, and picture books (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Even as adults, most are unaware of their own socialization, and members of dominant groups benefit from ignorance of their privileged position. Members of a dominant group have *internalized* their dominance when they believe their place in the social hierarchy is natural and normal. Internalized dominance can manifest in various ways, such as: “Rationalizing privilege as earned... Living one’s life segregated from the minoritized group yet feeling no loss or desire for connections with them... Feeling qualified to debate or explain away the experiences of minoritized groups” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 49). When members of an oppressed group do likewise, they have internalized their oppression. Examples of internalized oppression include: “Having low expectations for yourself and others associated with your group... Believing that your struggles with social institutions... are the result of your (or your group’s) inadequacy, rather than the result of unequally distributed resources” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 50).

Social justice theory first acknowledges systems of oppression as active, modern structures, not historical relics. Second, social justice seeks to restructure society by

actively fighting oppressive systems (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Further, social justice theory redefines both individual identity and social group identity. On the one hand, individuals gain or lose status based on their membership in various social groups, most of which are determined from birth rather than by choice. One's positionality refers to her role in a stratified society based on her intersecting group identities. According to social justice theory, one's positionality determines both her limitations and responsibilities in change-making; some identities carry the power to challenge the status quo and speak against injustice, while others are more vulnerable. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. xvii). On the other hand, social justice theory is not deterministic. Instead, social justice values bottom-up resistance and grassroots collaboration as key forms of social reconstruction. In other words, "because power relations are enacted through micro-situations, resistance is also possible at the micro level" (Paechter, 1998, p. 56).

In social justice pedagogy, teachers address both individual and social group identities in order to empower youth and shift oppressive norms. Educators help students navigate their complex positions in a stratified society, providing the tools to identify one's own privilege and/or to name one's oppression. By recognizing their limitations and perspectives, teachers can validate the student backgrounds and knowledge, therefore bolstering self-esteem and self-worth. (Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Heteronormative patriarchy

Oppressive systems perpetuate hierarchical social structures along the lines of gender and sexual orientation. Gender is a socially constructed category, meaning that

gender identity is not based in any “real,” external characteristic. Instead, gender results from an individual’s identity and sense of self, contextualized by cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity. According to Paechter (1998),

Although gender is usually ascribed to babies on the basis of perceived anatomical distinctions, our assumptions about the child's future are more to do with social and cultural values than with the direct consequences of such bodily features; we assume, however, that these cultural differences will follow fairly automatically from the physical ones... This assumption is in itself culturally produced. (p. 38)

Gender socialization is so powerful that, by the age of only two or three years old, children can recognize and police gender roles among their peers. (Paechter, 1998).

Gender has been socially constructed not only so that children face arbitrary definitions of girlhood and boyhood, but also so that some forms of girlhood and boyhood appear more acceptable or powerful. C.J. Pascoe (2012) explains the idea of multiple masculinities of hierarchical value, where a White, wealthy, athletic, unemotional, womanizing masculinity carries the most power. Students who do not adhere to hegemonic masculinities or femininities face severe social forces from their classmates, families, and school staff, inhibiting their identity development and sometimes inhibiting physical safety (Pascoe, 2012).

Patriarchal structures perpetuate the assumption that men and masculinity—even nonnormative masculinities—are superior to women and femininity. Patriarchy refers to the structures that devalue women and their needs and experiences, prioritizing and creating male domination. Hegemonic androcentrism—the premise that men are the “standard” form of humanity, with women as secondary and deviant from that standard—supports patriarchal structures (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Further, patriarchy describes male and female genders as opposite and dichotomous, thereby

positioning women as the cultural Other to the male Agent/ Individual. Historically, dominant groups have othered, or marginalized, certain groups in order to present them as “non-rational and thus less than fully human” (Paechter, 1998, p. 8). Othering and androcentrism function as support systems to the overarching structure of patriarchy. (Crenshaw, 1991; Paechter, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 40).

These systems significantly dehumanize and devalue women and girls, thereby condoning—and sometimes encouraging—male violence. Males, as a group, have long defined themselves “in opposition to and through the exclusion of” all things feminine (Paechter, 1998, p. 5). In any middle school lunch room or playground, boys who fail to adhere to an acceptable form of masculinity are equated to girls, thereby dehumanized, by such feminine language as “sissy” and “pansy” (Paechter, 1998, p. 95; Pascoe, 2012). Accompanying this language is the deeply homophobic “fag discourse,” by which boys police one another’s masculinity. Pascoe (2012) found that the derogatory term “fag,” which appears ubiquitously in high schools, refers primarily to a lack of acceptable masculinity rather than to homosexuality. This fact points to the importance of sexuality in culturally constructed gender roles, which I will discuss in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The aversion to femininity and appearing feminine ultimately dehumanizes girls in boys’ eyes, a fact evidenced by the way that some men recall their attitude toward girls in elementary and secondary school: “We considered them a subspecies” (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 78). Sadker et al. (2009) found that, over decades, boys respond with disturbing repulsion to the prompt, “What would you do if you woke up as a girl tomorrow?” Revealing the extent to which they have accepted violence against women,

many turn to graphic descriptions of suicide: “I would *kill* myself *right away* by setting myself on fire so no one knew”; “If I woke up tomorrow as a girl, I would stab myself in the heart fifty times with a dull butter knife. If I were still alive, I would run in front of a huge semi... and have my brains mashed to Jell-O. *That would do it*” (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 112). These responses illuminate how deeply patriarchy dehumanizes women and girls in the male mind. It also elucidates the normalization of violence against females, who appear so worthless in these boys’ minds that they would be better off dead. (Paechter, 1998; Sadker et al., 2009).

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals also face oppressive systems rooted in homophobia. Homophobia refers to discrimination against homosexual, bisexual, asexual, and other non-heterosexual individuals. Heteronormativity is the social structure that frames heterosexuality as the standard form of human experience, positioning all other sexual orientations as perverse, unnatural, and dangerous. In other words, heteronormativity describes

those elements of social expectations in which the [heterosexual] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist. (Koschoreck & Slattery 2006, pp. 158-159 as cited in Hickman 2012)

Like other forms of oppression, heteronormativity is often invisible because individuals are socialized with these perspectives from such a young age. This socialization appears in countless princess movies (which inevitably end in marriage between a man and woman), infinite stories and books that present a heterosexual nuclear family as the only family model, the tradition of pairing a prom king and queen, and comments as early as infancy that mark a child as a “lady’s man” or a “heartbreaker.” Through these and

myriad other practices, American childhood frames heterosexuality as the default and, usually, the only visible option.

Patriarchy and heteronormativity are not mutually exclusive spheres, however. Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* to refer to the numerous overlapping identities that shape any individual's complex experience of the stratified society in which they live. For example, I am not just a woman; I am a White, cisgender, able-bodied, bisexual woman from the upper-middle class; not one of these single identities can characterize an individual's experience in a classist, patriarchic, heteronormative, ableist, racist world. According to the essayist and poet Audre Lorde, "racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable" (1984, p. 110). Transgender actress Laverne Cox argues, "We cannot talk about ending homophobia without talking about ending patriarchy" ([The New School], 2014). These systems of oppression are not only intertwined, they also support one another through institutional systems meant to limit womanhood and sexuality. This thesis, therefore, takes an intersectional standpoint because it focuses on the experiences of gay and bisexual women

The oppressive structures facing lesbian and bisexual women are distinct from the oppression facing straight women or queer men. Despite similar experiences of homophobia and toxic masculinity, lesbian and bisexual women have unique experiences of the oppressive structures of American society and culture (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). In this thesis, I use the term heteronormative patriarchy to refer to the unique challenges facing those positioned at the intersection of queerness and womanhood. In fact, compulsive heterosexuality is a primary facet of patriarchy that compels women to enter intimately into relationships of unequal power with men (Rich,

1980). Heterosexuality appears, in heteronormative patriarchy, as proof of properly belonging to one's gender. For example, transgender women have traditionally had to prove their attraction to men before being granted access to sex-change surgery (Paechter, 1998, p. 50). Boys have long used "pansy," "fag," and other derogatory terms to associate their unsatisfactory peers with homosexuality, and therefore with femininity. Thus heteronormative patriarchy consists of more than the sum of its parts (heteronormativity and patriarchy); it is a distinct form of oppression facing only queer women and girls. (Crenshaw, 1991; Paechter, 1998; Sadker et al., 2009).

Note that, although intersectionality is an essential lens for this work, including every aspect of identity in this study is untenable. For this reason, I have focused on queer women and girls without distinguishing between the experiences of gay and bisexual women or asking how identities of race, class, gender, or age intersect with gendered heterosexism. Accordingly, I do not wish to generalize the experiences of any group, but to identify general patterns that occur within the experiences of queer women and girls and to make flexible conclusions that might apply to a diverse range of women within this group.

Gender Culture of Schooling

Public education is one of the many institutions in which heteronormative patriarchy shapes the socialization of children. Schools do not create stratification and oppression, but they are primary institutions that reiterate oppressive narratives and facilitate the internalization of dominance and oppression among different groups. American public-school students spend up to 1,000 hours in school each year, all the

while absorbing lessons about social structures, power dynamics, and taboos. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Further, schools become the primary site of identity development for many children. According to Blackburn (2002, p. 313-4), children develop identity in four “contexts”: (1) the figured world (how one understands her world and surroundings); (2) positionality (how one sees her individual role within the figured world); (3) space of authoring (the ability to claim agency and redefine one’s sense of self); (4) the making of worlds (active reconstruction of the outside world). Schools undeniably provide information from which children construct their figured worlds and positionalities, both from what is included or excluded in formal curricula and what is presented subtly in the “hidden curricula” of teacher actions, words, treatment, and school policy. Most often, schools reproduce heteronormative patriarchal narratives, positioning gay and bisexual women and girls as outsiders and silencing their voices. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

One such patriarchal narrative is the myth of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the idea that one’s success correlates directly to one’s effort; in other words, those who work hardest are the most successful. American schools perpetuate this myth in order to obscure the oppressive systems that prevent students of color, girls, queer students, students of poverty, and those who occupy multiple of these categories from engaging successfully in school. In reality, schools force students to play out gendered roles that limit girls’ success, penalizing and excluding girls who do not conform to heteronormative patriarchal expectations. In the gender culture of schooling, “successful” and “smart” girls are quiet and organized, have pretty penmanship, and

exist passively as the backdrop to boys' active, participatory learning. Those who adhere to these tropes receive a subpar education (an idea explored in depth in the upcoming section). For girls who do not or cannot play into these gendered expectations, the alternative is silence and gradual disappearance. (Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). By ignoring the systemic causes of girls' disengagement, silence, and disappearance, the narrative of meritocracy makes invisible and therefore perpetuates patriarchal structures (Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

American schools further perpetuate heteronormative patriarchy through the staff distribution and representation of authority figures. When the United States embraced mandatory public schooling in the late nineteenth century, the demand for educators increased exponentially, and schools began hiring women as teachers because they would accept lower wages than men. Since then, women made up the majority of primary and nursery school teachers in the United States. However, research consistently shows that men dominate educational positions with higher status and authority, such as high school teachers, administrative positions, and superintendents. (Collard & Reynolds, 2005; Fennema, 1976; E. Thompson, 1994). In the early 1970s, women made up 85% of elementary teachers, 50% of secondary educators, and only 1% of district superintendents (the highest ranking educational profession). (Fennema, 1976, p. 344). In 2005, the number of female superintendents rose only to 13%, and women continued to be underrepresented in institutions of higher education, making up 31% of higher education faculty and only 16% of executive positions like university deans (Collard & Reynolds, 2005, p. 91). In 2017, the Oregon Department of Education reported women making up 71% of the state's teachers, 51% of principals, and 30% of

superintendents (Gill, 2017, p. 8). Because of the number of women teaching, educators face deprofessionalization and scapegoating from outside their field. In other words: "The vilification of K-12 teachers is part and parcel of [widespread] misogyny... Attacks on teachers--and other public sector workers like nurses and social workers--are overwhelmingly attacks on women" (Butler-Wall et al., 2016, p. 18). Patriarchal devaluing of teaching results in unreasonably low pay for female teachers and attitudes in the general public that teachers are lazy and unqualified. (Sadker et al., 2009).

This distribution of female educational professionals has three implications. One, these numbers "provide a picture of women being generally excluded from the areas of management, decision-making, and responsibility in education" (E. Thompson, 1994, p. 15). In other words, women's interests are not represented in educational decisions and policies, because women themselves are absent from these fields. Second, female students have few role models for leadership and high status and are therefore less likely to see themselves in and to pursue these roles (Collard & Reynolds, 2005; Fennema, 1976; E. Thompson, 1994). Third, queer girls rarely have access to the reliable adult support systems that straight boys do. Because of their marginalized identities, queer women and girls do not always trust in adults—such as teachers, counselors, and administrators—who do not share their own identity. Thus these students are isolated from adult support and the obvious benefits that come with which it comes. (Birden, 2005).

In these ways, public education in the United States not only deprives queer women and girls of opportunities to see themselves in literature, but it also deprives them of female role models and leaders. However, educators and educational

institutions have the power to disrupt these narratives. Particularly, using the framework of social justice education, teachers can encourage and empower students in the “space of authoring” and “making of worlds” (Blackburn, 2002, p. 3133-4). With adequate support and a secure environment, a student “has the opportunity, over and over again, to author herself or himself into the world as someone empowered, which may result in the making of new worlds” (Blackburn, 2002, p. 314). Social justice educators support these processes by rewriting curricula to represent the perspectives of marginalized peoples, by replacing traditional disciplinary systems—which disproportionately affect queer students and students of color (Snapp et al., 2015)—by integrating students’ families and communities into the classroom, and by valuing student knowledge over sanctioned academic knowledge. (Blackler, 2011; Chapman et al., 2011; Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Sadker et al., 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Background: Inequity in American Schools

Given that schools function as sites of heteronormative patriarchal socialization, an overview of the specific forms of discrimination that queer women and girls face in schools is necessary. First, I describe the plentiful research surrounding bullying and harassment facing queer, female students. Second, I discuss issues surrounding disciplinary policies and exclusive curricula. Third, I examine biased teacher practices and their effect on student self-esteem as the subtlest forms heteronormative patriarchal schooling. Finally, I discuss the implications of this gendered schooling.

Bullying and harassment is perhaps the most visible and thoroughly researched forms of oppression in American schools. This visibility is perhaps due to the threat of real violence that backs harassment. In 2005, 31% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students

had been threatened or injured with a weapon at school, compared to only 7% of straight students (Birden, 2005, p. 13). Infamous cases—such as the fatal shooting of gay student Larry King by a classmate in 2008—illustrate the gravity of such threats (Lassiter & McCarthy-Sifford, 2015). For nearly three decades, The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has issued reports focusing on the bullying and harassment of LGBTQ students in American primary and secondary schools. The most recent GLSEN report (Kosciw et al., 2016) showed that recent efforts to improve the experiences of LGBTQ students by means of policy and school-based intervention has made some improvement in LGBTQ inclusion in schools. However, the majority (85.2%) of LGBTQ students still experienced harassment on a regular basis. For example, virtually all students heard “gay” used as an insult, and 95.7% of LGBTQ students experienced harassment regarding gender expression (i.e. not appearing feminine or masculine enough). Further, cisgender girls were more likely than cisgender boys to experience a hostile school environment. The effects of bullying and harassment were clear: victims were more likely to miss school, had lower grade point averages, and were more likely to report that they did not plan to pursue post-secondary education. LGBTQ students were also more likely to drop out before completing high school. (Kosciw et al., 2016, p. xi-xx).

Many studies corroborate GLSEN’s findings. In a study of a North Carolina high school, Woolley (2017) found that students frequently experienced homophobic microaggressions, including the disturbing phenomenon of “corrective rape threats,” or comments from a straight student implying that (nonconsensual) heterosexual sex would make a queer student become straight (p. 91). Gym and physical education

classes are often the most dangerous and uncomfortable school settings for queer students, as locker rooms and physical activity provide opportunities for straight, cisgender students to point out gender nonconformity and accuse their queer classmates of inappropriate behavior (Burdge et al., 2013, p. 7).

LGBTQ girls face additional forms of bullying in school, namely sexual harassment. Because patriarchal culture positions women as sexual objects, passive under male gaze and manipulation, boys frequently feel entitled to comment on girls' appearance and sexuality, to touch girls without their consent, and to make unwelcome sexual advances. The American Association of University Women (AAUW; 2013) found that 56 percent of girls had experienced sexual harassment, compared to 40% of boys. Further, girls experience more physically intrusive harassment (Hand & Sanchez, 2000 in AAUW, 2013). Sexual harassment has negative impacts on girls' emotional and academic wellbeing: "Negative emotional effects take a toll on students' and especially girls' education, resulting in decreased productivity and increased absenteeism from school" (AAUW, 2013, p. 3). Harassers frequently use homophobic language (e.g. "that's so gay," calling a girl a "dyke") in order to police their classmates' gender expression and adherence to gender roles (AAUW, 2013). As a result, LGBTQ girls experience heightened risk for, and impact from, sexual harassment. Further, the fear of being "outed" to classmates, school staff, and parents may prevent many queer girls from reporting sexual harassment or asking for help.

Multiple studies have found that teachers and administrators themselves sometimes harass queer women and girls in the classroom, though teacher-student harassment occurs at a lower rate than harassment between students. P.E. teachers are

the most common harassers, particularly in the policing of acceptable masculinities (Burdge et al., 2013; Sadker et al., 2009; Snapp et al., 2015). For example, Pascoe shares accounts of gym teachers failing to intervene when outwardly gay students were beat up in locker rooms, refusing to allow male students private spaces to change clothes, and referring to students as “faggots” (2012, p. 67).

Gendered heterosexism also appears within school disciplinary protocols. Snapp et al. (2015) found that LGBTQ students received unfair punishments for behaviors including for same-sex displays of affection (which went unpunished in heterosexual couples) and for self-defense when being bullied. Disciplinary measures sometimes resulted in students being “outed” as gay or bisexual to their families without the students’ consent or knowledge, e.g. in disciplinary calls home from school administration. These experiences are especially traumatic and dangerous for students who live in abusive households. One quarter of lesbian, bi, and gay students who come out to their families are forced to leave their homes, and as a result, 40% of homeless teens are LGBTQ. (Birden, 2005; Snapp et al., 2015). Additionally, disciplinary measures such as suspensions and expulsions directly exclude students from school. LGBTQ students, therefore, are therefore disproportionately excluded from educational settings, with 32% of LGBTQ teens reporting that they would not finish high school (Kosciw et al., 2016; Snapp et al., 2015).

School dress codes enable gendered school discipline practices. Dress codes frequently target girls’ clothing, prohibiting midriff, shorts and skirts above a certain length, visible bra straps, or tank tops. Even when dress codes are not explicitly gendered, those who enforce school dress often target girls and not boys. For example,

teachers and administrators may discipline girls with visible bra straps because of a policy prohibiting visible undergarments, but likely do not penalize boys whose briefs show above their pants. School districts and administrators often justify dress codes with the rationale that overly revealing clothing can distract other students (usually boys) during instructional time. However, this rationale serves to further prioritize boys' learning over girls' humanity, sexualizing girls as early as primary school and positioning girls as secondary members of the school community while boys are the primary recipients of educational services. Further, some dress codes require students to wear clothing deemed appropriate for their biological sex. This prevents many queer women from dressing in ways that are comfortable to them (e.g., those who prefer to present themselves as "butch") or creates penalties for those who do (Raby, 2010).

Schools further enforce heteronormative patriarchy through their choice of curriculum and reading material. Schools present students with both overt (explicit) and covert (implicit or hidden) curricula. The former consists of lesson plans, text books and other readings, and activities that teachers present to students; the latter represents the ideologies, power structures, and narratives that students absorb from the *way* that teachers teach, discipline, and speak. Heteronormative patriarchy creates both implicit and explicit curricula that harms queer women and girls and deprives them of a quality education.

Women, LGBTQ individuals, and particularly LGBTQ women are shockingly absent in most schools' formal curricula. Queer female students rarely learn about historical figures, activists, scientists, mathematicians, artists, musicians, authors, and poets to whom they can relate or with whom they share life experiences. (Porfilio et al.,

2012). Schools have traditionally excluded any material explicitly referencing sexuality or sexual orientation out of the fear that parents and community members will find this content inappropriate for children (Birden, 2005). Further, laws in several southern states require that homosexuality be presented negatively in health and sex education classes (McNeil, 2013, p. 829). These practices and policies give queer girls few chances to learn about others like them, to understand the histories and characteristics of LGBTQ communities, or see themselves as professionals in academic disciplines.

LGBTQ figures and/or women are equally invisible in language arts curricula. In a case study of a high school language arts textbook, Hickman (2012) found that only 14 out of 135 compiled authors were connected to the LGBTQ community or addressed LGBTQ issues in their writing. The textbook's biographies of these 14 authors excluded any mention of their connection to LGBTQ communities (Hickman, 2012, p. 75). Further, this textbook provided heteronormative discussion questions and analyses of each reading. For example, the textbook included a poem by Emily Dickinson—whose sexual orientation is subject to scholarly debate—which depicted an interaction between two ungended characters referred to only as “you” and “I.” Rather than leaving the relationship between these two characters open to interpretation or—a powerful alternative—using this text to create a discussion about Dickinson's sexuality, the textbook editors suggested that the characters were husband and wife. This reading presented the poem through a heteronormative lens, preventing readers from creating other interpretations. (Hickman, 2012, p. 75-76). Although Hickman's analysis focused on a single textbook, her findings are likely representative of most texts available to language arts students and teachers.

Children's fiction and assigned readings similarly marginalize female characters and enforced gender roles. Researchers (e.g. Sadker et al., 2009; Weitzmen et al., 1975, as cited in Sadker et al., 2009) have thoroughly illustrated the lack of positive representation of women and girls in children's and young adult literature. Weitzmen and colleagues (1975, as cited in Sadker et al., 2009) found that elementary books and readings contained five boy-centered stories for every two girl-centered stories; three times as many male characters to female characters; picture books showed pictures of boys and men eleven times more frequently than women and girls. Further, children's authors consistently portrayed women who embodied and benefitted from traditionally feminine traits: gentleness, nurturing, attractiveness, and willingness to put others before themselves (Fennema, 1976). In modern day, these inequities may be less pronounced, but they are still present. According to Sadker et al. (2009), men in children's literature continue to be

seen as the movers and shakers of history, scientists of achievement, and the political leaders. Boys are routinely shown as active, creative, brave, athletic, achieving, and curious. In striking contrast, girls are often portrayed as dependent, passive, fearful, docile, and even as victims, with a limited role in or impact on the world. (p. 89)

Female characters continue to appear most often as mothers, princesses, and passive observers, while male characters maintain unhealthy aspects of privileged masculinities: aggressiveness, competitiveness, and strength (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 91). These problematic portrayals of and often exclusion of female characters "contribute negatively to children's development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence personality characteristics" (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 92). Further, these representations alienate women and girls who

do not see themselves as traditionally feminine—as queer women and girls often do not—by presenting impossibly narrow versions of girlhood/womanhood.

Bisexual and gay women and girls find themselves similarly invisible and lacking role models in all content areas, particularly in male-gendered subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Further, GLSEN reports that less than 17% of schools have LGBTQ-inclusive curricula (Kosciw et al., 2016, p. xvi). These studies paint a grim picture of formal curricula that excludes queer women and girls almost entirely.

Hidden or implicit curricula also exclude and obscure queer female students. Teachers and students alike internalize heteronormative narratives and biases, resulting in inferior education for queer women and girls. “Stereotype threat”—a term coined by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in 1995—refers to the impact of stereotypes surrounding a marginalized group on that group’s academic success. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that students who believed an assessment would measure a stereotyped aspect of their identity tended to fulfill the stereotype. For example, when graduate students taking a linguistic assessment were told that the test would measure their intellectual capability, Black participants scored significantly lower than White participants. However, when told that the test was an experiment and would not measure intellectual ability, the two groups scored about the same (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Though Steele and Aronson demonstrated stereotype threat in terms of race, the same effects apply to other marginalized groups who face well-known negative stereotypes. For example, due to the stereotype that girls and women are less capable of logic and reasoning than men, female students have historically felt inadequate in

classes that emphasize analytical reasoning (Fennema, 1976, p. 346-7). Further, teachers often have lower academic expectations of their female students due to their implicit bias and patriarchal socialization. (Sadker et al., 2009).

Female students develop lower self-efficacy due to these stereotypes, biases, and low expectations. Self-efficacy refers to a student's confidence in her ability to complete a specific task. High self-efficacy allows students to take greater academic risks, ask for help, enroll in challenging classes, and persist with challenging material even after initial failures. (Bandura, 1986, 1994, 1997, and 2006 as cited in Woolfolk, 2017). However, stereotype threat and low teacher expectations decrease girls' self-efficacy in school, causing them to disengage in and even opt out of certain classes or content areas. (AAUW, 2015; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Further, patriarchal narratives shape students' attitudes about their academic success and failure. Boys typically attribute their success to innate skill and dismiss their failures as chance or lack of effort. Girls do the opposite: they attribute their success to luck and their failures to innate ability (e.g. "I'm just not good at math," or "I'm too stupid"). These attitudes about success and failure reinforce students' self-efficacy. (Sadker et al., 2009).

Teacher practices powerfully reinforce such harmful ideologies about gender, success, and who deserves to learn. Even excellent teachers "inadvertently teach boys better than girls" due to their implicit biases and patriarchal socialization (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 8). In decades of classroom observation, Sadker et al. (2009) found that teachers consistently focus on boys' learning while silencing girls. Teachers focus on boys, allowing boys to answer more questions, providing better feedback to boys who offer incorrect answers, directing their attention and orienting their bodies toward boys

(placing girls at their backs). Teachers allow boys to speak without permission but penalize girls who do not raise their hands (Sadker et al., 2009). Further, teachers offer more and better feedback to boys during worktime. Both in-depth positive feedback and criticism facilitate student engagement and learning. While teachers offer plenty of this kind of feedback to boys, they respond to girls with noncommittal, unhelpful “okay”s more than any other comment (Sadker et al., 2009). These practices, whether or not teachers are aware of them, train girls to be invisible and silent in school. (Kommer, 2006; Sadker et al., 2009). Sadker et al. (2009) report:

When we speak with girls about what they do to avoid talking in class, they share their creative strategies: They check where the teacher never looks and then sit there. They raise their hands tentatively, halfway. If it looks as though the teacher might actually call on them, they change their raised arm to a yawn, a stretch, or some other movement. They use the once-in-a-while approach to classroom interaction: consciously self-regulating their speech, they answer every now and then so that the teacher will think they are making an effort. (p. 120)

Teacher practices illustrate to all students that the primary work of school is to educate, empower, and privilege boys. As a result, girls consciously work to disappear in the classroom. (Paechter, 1998; Sadker et al., 2009).

Given the power dynamics of public schools, many girls suffer from low self-esteem, particularly during middle school when they begin puberty. During the shift from elementary to middle school, girls’ reported self-esteem plummets, while boys report roughly stagnant confidence. (Sadker et al., 2009). For boys, puberty represents increased power—the beginning of manhood. Girls, however, see their changing bodies and brain chemistry as a negative, even threatening process. Many middle school girls feel like targets of male attention, harassment, and even violence as they grow closer to womanhood. (Sadker et al., 2009). The process of physical maturation feels particularly

vulnerable for gay and bisexual girls, for whom increased male attention and sexual remarks are especially uncomfortable and unwanted. (Kommer, 2006). Gay and bisexual girls typically begin to recognize their same-sex attraction during early adolescence, adding additional stress and self-doubt to these students' middle school experiences. For many queer girls,

their junior high school years [were] the most painful for them. Coming out to themselves, without psychological or social support, was described as 'a time when I wanted to die,' 'a period where I just wanted to blot out all my feelings,' or 'a time when I felt like I was suffocating.' (Uribe & Harbeck, 1993, p. 22)

Clearly, low self-esteem is one of many reasons that queer girls feel unwelcome in mainstream American education. Additionally, these students must cope with bullying and sexual harassment, discriminatory disciplinary policies, unrepresentative curricula, and inadequate instruction from biased teachers. In other words, public schools fit John Dewey's definition of "mis-educative" because they have "the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further [developmental] experience" (Birden, 2005, p. 15). Given this school climate, it is no surprise that queer female students have historically turned to informal, community-based education. LGBTQ students drop out of school at a rate three times greater than the national average for all students, and hostile, unsupportive school environments are the most common reason that students do not complete high school (Bethard, 2004, p. 418; Palmer et al., 2016, p. 17).

The historical and structural nature of heteronormativity and patriarchy in American schooling has not entirely precluded attempts to improve educational settings for female and LGBTQ students. With the support of the compelling and consistent research cited in this chapter, many groups—from national legislators to small

assemblies of teachers—have challenged the existing school cultures. In Chapter 2, I outline the legislation, policies, and practices with which activists have attempted to rewrite the heteronormative and patriarchal narratives of schooling over the past fifty years.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Efforts for Justice

Efforts to change the heteronormative and patriarchal structures of schooling have taken a variety of forms over the past fifty years, including national and state legislation, school-wide policy, and practices within individual classrooms. In the following pages, I outline examples of each of these reform types, including an analysis of the benefits of and limitations to each approach. I argue that no one approach is complete on its own, and that top-down policies (e.g. legislation) must be supplemental to a foundation of social justice pedagogical practices within the classroom.

National Legislation

The Common Core Standards are perhaps the most significant national legislation impacting all American public school students. Implemented under the Obama administration in 2010, the Race to the Top legislation offered states additional education funding under certain conditions, including adoption of Common Core standards and increased high-stakes testing (Ravitch, 2014, para. 10). Within months, forty-five states and Washington, D.C. had adopted the new standards (Ravitch, 2014, para. 2). Common Core prescribes English Language Arts standards in four themes for grades six through eight: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and conventions. Across middle grades, these standards focus on text comprehension, analysis, argumentation and other genres of writing, and conventional grammar/spelling (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010a). Figure 1 shows the specific reading and writing skills required by Common Core across grades six through eight.

Standard	Grade(s)		
	6	7	8
L.3.1f. Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.			
L.3.3a. Choose words and phrases for effect.			
L.4.1f. Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons.			
L.4.1g. Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., <i>to/too/two</i> ; <i>there/their</i>).			
L.4.3a. Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely. ¹			
L.4.3b. Choose punctuation for effect.			
L.5.1d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.			
L.5.2a. Use punctuation to separate items in a series. ²			
L.6.1c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.			
L.6.1d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).			
L.6.1e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.			
L.6.2a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.			
L.6.3a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style. ³			
L.6.3b. Maintain consistency in style and tone.			
L.7.1c. Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers.			
L.7.3a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.			
L.8.1d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.			
L.9–10.1a. Use parallel structure.			

Figure 1: Common Core Standards for reading and writing across grades 6, 7, and 8
Image from National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010a, p. 56.

Common Core has garnered mixed reactions from educators and students across the United States. On the one hand, educators do not have to teach any specific texts or themes in order to meet Common Core standards in ELA (NGACBP, 2010a). Students can practice Common Core-mandated skills using practically any text. This openness allows language arts teachers to individualize their reading assignments to the needs and interests of their students (NGACBP, 2010a). Further, the flexibility of Common Core leaves space for teachers to assign texts by marginalized authors and to challenge and replace the dominant narratives found in traditional assigned texts while continuing to meet national standards.

On the other hand, Common Core has faced serious opposition. Perhaps its most vocal opponent is Diane Ravitch, former employee of the Department of Education

under President George H. W. Bush and now educational activist in opposition to the same policies she helped to create. Ravitch criticizes Common Core as one of many policies pushing American education towards neoliberal privatization. According to Ravitch, current educational reforms feature:

1) a heavy reliance on standardized testing; 2) a willingness to eliminate collective bargaining and tenure; 3) a hostility to public education as such; 4) a preference for privately managed charter schools; 5) support for attacks on the teaching profession, including hostility to tenure and professionalism; 6) support for alternate routes into teaching like Teach for America, whose recruits have only five weeks of training and typically leave after 2-3 years in the classroom. (Bailey, 2015, p. 329)

Policies like Common Core place false blame on teachers for their students' low performance, remove funding from schools in the most financial need, narrow curricula, and are successful at measuring little besides students' socioeconomic status (Ravitch, 2014). Others point out the dramatic increase of standardized testing that Common Core instigates and the harmful effects of such frequent testing: teachers who are already crunched for time must make time for mandated curricula and test-taking instruction; students suffer from debilitating test anxiety (Kudla, 2014).

Clearly, there are many disadvantages to Common Core and the trend of neoliberal privatization that Common Core supports. These educational trends and their accompanying legislation affect *all* students, not the least those who already suffer from low self-esteem and self-efficacy, hostility in schools, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Kosciw et al., 2016). Despite these harmful shifts in American education, however, Common Core leaves enough space for individual teachers to disrupt dominant narratives and culture. In other words, this legislation does not eliminate the social justice efforts of dedicated educators.

Other national legislation has sought not simply to allow but to aid teachers in this social justice work, including the disruption of heteronormative patriarchy. Among the oldest and best-known of these laws is Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The law stated: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Mazzarella, 1977, p. 1). Effective July of 1975, Title IX provided financial incentive for public schools to equalize admissions, athletic funding, and student access to classes, extracurriculars, financial aid, facilities. (Moody & Vergon, 1977, p. xiii-3).

Though Title IX most visibly affected female sports teams and athletic programs, it also changed the structure of public school classes by requiring that all students have access to all classes regardless of gender. This forced schools to accept all students into gendered courses such as home economics and shop if they were to receive federal funding. Further, school counselors could no longer legally advise students towards or against traditionally gendered careers because of their gender. (Mazzarella, 1977, p. 14). Title IX also protected the educational rights of pregnant and parenting teens, which had formerly been decided individually by districts. As a result, the number of pregnant teens—especially Black teen mothers—increased drastically in public schools. (Guldi, 2016, p. 103-7). Today, schools continue to look to Title IX for structure in fighting sexual harassment (Henderson, 2013).

Despite this progress, schools continued to propagate sexism. Many schools failed to adequately respond to the legislation when it first became effective, so that by 1977 the majority of schools had not even completed the primary self-evaluation

required for Title IX compliance. Some schools sacrificed federal funding instead of making the necessary changes. Further, both teachers and students resisted full integration of gendered classes. (Mazzarella, 1977, p. 2). These issues resulted in part from Title IX's lack of guidelines for how to change discriminatory practices, making it a school-specific decision if and how to comply. Though the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has released supplemental tools and guidelines since the late 1970s, these materials were not built into the legislation. Further, in recent years, the DOE has withdrawn many of the available supports, such as question and answer documents for school districts and policies that encouraged schools to provide greater consequences to perpetrators of sexual violence. Without these supports, schools are largely without guidance towards or structure for implementing Title IX. (Churches, 2017; Guldi, 2016; Henderson, 2013).

Despite nearly fifty years of this national legislation, discriminatory hiring of school staff, curricular underrepresentation, and sexual harassment remain as evidence of the sexism and misogyny in American public schools (see Chapter 1). Additionally, there is no national legislation in place to directly protect LGBTQ students. The 1984 Equal Access Act (EAA), however, protects Gay-Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) in public schools. The first official GSA began in 1988 in Concord, Massachusetts, though a student group at New York City's George Washington High School takes precedence as America's first gay student group (started in 1972). There are now over 4,000 GSAs in America's secondary schools. These student-led clubs provide safe spaces for LGBTQ students to discuss their concerns and escape hostile environments and schoolmates. Additionally, they often educate the rest of the school regarding LGTBQ

issues and act as anti-bullying organizations. (Collin, 2013; Johnson, 2007; Murphy, 2012).

Many schools and districts attempt to exclude GSAs due to fear of controversy, pressure from religious family groups, or outright homophobia, but the EAA protects GSAs and other student groups. The EAA states that secondary schools must give equal access to *all* noncurricular groups. The legislation applies only to student-initiated and -led groups; it does not apply to required or teacher-led groups, or any club that disrupts the learning environment. (Hutton, 2004, p. 18; Zirkel, 2005, p. 57). Multiple court cases since 2002 have established the right of middle and high school students to create GSAs despite school attempts to paint GSAs as disruptive and to redefine “noncurricular groups” to exclude GSAs (Anonymous, 2006; Kennedy, 2013; Zirkel, 2005, p. 57-60).

The benefits of GSAs in creating an inclusive and safe school environment are immense. LGBTQ students with access to a GSA tend to have better mental health, connections with reliable and accepting adults, access to relevant books, and more robust social lives than those without a GSA. Additionally, LGBTQ students whose schools have GSAs are less likely to receive failing grades or miss school, to experience harassment, to attempt suicide, or to engage in risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and unprotected sex. Further, staff advisors of GSAs serve to amplify the voices and needs of LGBTQ students and to assist student activism. These benefits are particularly important for students who do not otherwise have access to safe space or education in their communities. (Collin, 2013, p. 3-4; Murphy, 2012, p. 888; Poteat et al., 2013; Walls et al., 2010, p. 311; Watson et al., 2010, p. 103).

Despite these benefits, students have limited access to GSAs. Schools resist the EAA by

trying to stop the GSA from being formed at all, lengthening the process of forming the club, requiring parental permission to join when other clubs do not require parental permission, requiring that the club not be called a GSA or that it not focus on LGBT issues, or not allowing the GSA to do things that other clubs do, such as meeting in a classroom, making announcements, putting up posters, or having a picture in the yearbook. (Murphy, 2012, p. 888)

While many of these tactics violate the EAA and can be tried in court, approaches that amplify parental power—such as requiring permission for students to join any club—are difficult to combat and often make students afraid to approach the GSA lest they be outed to their families. (Tonn, 2013; Watson et al., 2010). While GSAs are student-led, they require a staff advisor, and at some schools there may be no visible LGBT or ally staff whom students trust in such a position. Finally, in states where sodomy laws target same-gender sexual activity, GSAs may lose legal protection if students attempt to discuss or educate about sexual activity. (Watson et al., 2010, p. 109-115; Zirkel, 2005).

State Legislation

State legislation is another vehicle for equity-focused initiatives. One outstanding example is California's Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act, effective as of 2012. Introduced by openly gay state senator Mark Leno, the act represents a response to the lack of LGBT history available to American teens in most curricula and to the bullying epidemic facing queer students. (Blacker, 2011, p. 11; Leno, 2013, p. 105-6). The FAIR Education Act requires social studies/history classes in kindergarten through 12th grade to teach about the role of LGBTQ people and members of other marginalized groups in the "economic, political, and social

development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society” (California Department of Education, 2017, para. 2). Additionally, the act prohibits the use of teaching materials that portray a group or individual poorly based on their sexuality. The act is open-ended in that school districts are responsible for deciding what compliance looks like, and there have been no changes to state assessment standards. (California DOE, 2017; Leno, 2013, p. 107).

According to Vecellio (2012), the FAIR Education Act has the potential to fulfill any of four levels of curricular integration. At the first level, students learn about the heroes and holidays of a marginalized group as an aside. At the second level, ideas and content relevant to the marginalized group are added to the curricula, but there are no structural changes. At the third level, curricular structure changes to integrate the perspectives of marginalized groups. At the fourth level, students engage in social action and activism (Vecellio, 2012, p. 169). It depends on teachers and schools to decide how thoroughly and effectively to integrate LGBTQ issues and people into curricula, which is both the strength and the weakness of the act.

On one hand, the FAIR Education Act attempts to fight the structural oppression of LGBTQ individuals, rather than creating surface-level policies surrounding isolated issues of bullying, drop-out rates, and other problems. Curricular restructuring is an attempt to change ideology and understanding as well as representation, and thus to make a dent in the heterosexist culture that characterizes public schools. Further, inclusive curriculum is typically correlated with decreased bullying, increased attendance, and better community connection. (Burdge et al., 2013, p. 4; Leno, 2013, p.

106; Leonardi, 2017). On the other hand, the burden of compliance falls almost entirely on individual teachers. The act does not provide new textbooks, lesson plans, teacher training, or examples of what curricular inclusion looks like. Part of this issue is connected to the educational budget crisis: because of low funds, California has delayed the development and distribution of inclusive textbooks and curricula. (Blackler, 2011; Burdge et al., 2013, p. 3; California DOE, 2017; Laub, 2013; Leno, 2013, p. 109; Leonardi, 2017).

As a response to these criticisms, the Committee on LGBT History revised state standards in order to bring them into accordance with the FAIR Education Act. The framework's authors sought to increase school motivation and clarity in revising history curricula, and to levy California's weight in the shaping of national textbook markets and therefore content. The new standards push teachers towards the "transformation" and "social action" levels of curriculum integration. (C. Morris, 2016; Romesburg et al., 2014).

For middle schoolers, the standards require that 5th graders learn about "variation of time, region, and culture in colonial American practices and laws with regards to gender and sexuality" and 8th graders learn about "fundamental transformations in gender and sexuality in conjunction with nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization" (Romesburg et al., 2014, p. 4). However, this framework does not provide any standards for grades six and seven, which make up the bulk of middle school years. This gap means that sixth and seventh grade teachers have no guidelines or even incentive to integrate FAIR standards into their curricula, and that students in these grades are not guaranteed to receive the benefits of the FAIR

Education Act. However, a trial period of the framework yielded largely positive feedback from teachers, who named the following benefits: increased teacher ease and understanding; structural reformation of lesson units; lessened taboo and discomfort of LGBT-centered conversations (Romesburg, 2014, p. 6).

The framework, implemented in 2016, has improved but not perfected the FAIR Education Act. Additionally, even highly successful policy such as FAIR cannot fully solve the problems and complexities that teachers face in their classrooms every day. Even with new standards, teachers do not yet have access to supportive materials like books and lesson plans. More importantly, teachers attempting to implement the FAIR Act are themselves living and teaching in gendered heteronormative spaces. Without training, pedagogical tools, and large-scale changes in discriminatory policies beyond curriculum, the burden of LGBT integration continues to fall unreasonably and unsuccessfully on individual teachers. The result is that teachers, unsure and unsupported in this practice, opt to teach less intensively integrated lessons or not to teach them at all. (Leonardi, 2017, p. 695-7; McNeil, 2013; Romesburg et al., 2014, p. 7). While top-down policy creates important foundations for change, the persistence of gendered heteronormativity in Californian public schools despite such policy is exemplifies the ways that policy fails to solve the problem of educational inequity (see Chapter 1).

School-Wide Policy

Some schools have addressed LGBTQ issues by changing policies, programs, and practices within their community. One example is New York City's Harvey Milk High School (HMHS), which opened in 1985 to serve primarily LGBT teens. Originally

a private school, HMHS reopened in 2003 as a public school with the intention to improve the dismal graduation rates of LGBT students (who, in 2004, dropped out at a rate three times higher than their non-LGBT counterparts). The school was immensely successful on this front: 95% of HMHS students graduated, with 60% continuing on to higher education. Further, the school provided multifaceted counseling and tools for coping with the unique challenges its students faced. (Bethard, 2004, p. 417-9; Rofes, 1989, p. 449).

Harvey Milk High School has nonetheless faced opposition. In 2003, for instance, parents of heterosexual students in NYC filed a lawsuit against HMHS, claiming that the school practiced discriminatory admission and therefore should not receive state funding. This argument had obvious holes, including the fact that enrollment in HMHS was entirely voluntary and the school admitted straight students without issue, though admittedly few of them; the case failed and HMHS is still open and state-run today. Randy Hedlund (2004) argues that a school specifically for LGBT students is unethical because it creates inherently unequal segregation, similar to racial segregation. Hedlund claims that “Separating homosexual students from heterosexual students deprives them of invaluable qualities of schooling” (2004, p. 428). Given that, for most LGBT youth, the primary “qualities” of schooling alongside heterosexual students are harassment and invisibility, this argument is flawed. Regardless of ethical concerns, not all LGBT students have the option to attend schools created for their benefit, and the environment within mainstream schools must improve if LGBT students are to receive fair education. (Bethard, 2004, p. 419-20; Hedlund, 2004; Rofes, 1989).

Other schools have addressed this problem by introducing programs for LGBTQ students. One example is Project 10, started by counselor Virginia Uribe in 1985 to prevent LGBTQ drop-out at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles. The program started as an informal rap group that met during lunch, and quickly evolved into a more structured project including peer and drop-in counseling, community education, and staff training for school counselors, nurses, and teachers throughout the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). By making space for students to voice their frustrations and fears—including the immense fear surrounding AIDS—the program impacted “students who never before had someone teach them how to cope with low self-esteem, isolation and violence from verbal and physical abuse” (Virginia Uribe as quoted in Quintanilla, 1989, p. 2). For years, Project 10 saw success in the form of increased attendance, improved grades, school safety, cost effectiveness, and school-wide willingness to discuss LGBTQ issues. (Quintilla, 1989, p. 1-2; Rofes, 1989, p. 447-8; Uribe, 1993, p. 109; Uribe & Harbeck, 1993, p. 24).

Project 10 now exists only in name, now referring to a legal program housed by the LAUSD Office of the General Counsel. The program provides anti-discrimination counsel for the district and distributes materials (e.g. fliers for National Coming Out Day), but does not provide any on-site training or counseling. According to Project 10 specialist Judy Chiasson, the student support aspect of Project 10 has been replaced by GSAs. (J. Chiasson, personal correspondence, Oct. 3, 2017). While GSAs have benefits, as discussed earlier, they are student-led and therefore do not provide the professional counseling or schoolwide transformation that made Project 10 so powerful to begin with.

Within the Classroom

The previous sections show that top-down attempts to fight gendered heterosexism have both benefits and limitations. I argue, however, that the most powerful form of change is that which occurs inside the classroom in interaction between teacher and students. Top-down policies are necessary in that they provide a structure for change, but without changes at the most fundamental level of education—that which occurs within classrooms—these initiatives are not successful. For example, Abraham (1989) showed that teachers have historically inhibited anti-sexist initiatives by unintentionally policing gender roles. Further, research shows that it is essential for teachers and counselors to receive proper training if they are to act as advocates and changemakers (Lassiter & McCarthy Sifford, 2015). Finally, students receive constant and ubiquitous messaging about traditional gender and sexuality, and it is those with whom children have direct contact—not policies—that empower students to recognize and critically engage these messages (Hickman, 2012).

Many educators and pedagogical theorists have come to similar conclusions about the power and responsibility of classroom teachers. I do not claim to be the first to come to this conclusion or to suggest social justice-oriented guidelines for classroom teachers. Rather, this thesis builds on a well-established body of literature on which social justice educators already found their practices, pedagogy, and curricula. For example, the Rethinking Schools organization offers an abundance of educational resources, including books that illustrate the theory and exemplary practices of teachers attempting to disrupt systems of oppression ranging from patriarchy to racism to poverty (e.g. *Rethinking Sexism, Gender, and Sexuality* by Butler-Wall et al., 2016).

Linda Christensen—among those who write for Rethinking Schools—has authored many indispensable teacher resources. For example, this thesis draws upon Christensen’s *Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom* (2009) and her collaboration with Dyan Watson, *Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice* (2015). Further, the landmark film *It’s Elementary!* (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996) documents the efforts of teachers to introduce LGBT issues into their elementary and secondary classrooms. *It’s Elementary!* revealed the pioneering work of educators who rejected the intense taboos surrounding sexuality in the 1990s and created space around these issues for student discussion, questioning, and discovery.

The work of Rethinking Schools, Linda Christensen, Chasnoff & Cohen, and others² establishes the foundation of practices currently employed by social justice educators. Through these practices, students become active learners who take personal authority over their learning, rather than passively absorbing—or perhaps rejecting—a lesson. Further, social justice education situates learning in the real world, giving students an audience via newspapers, conferences and government groups. This process is especially powerful for children whom the schooling system typically marginalizes and silences, including LGBTQ girls. (Chapman et al., 2011; Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Rofes, 1989, p. 451). However, these social justice pedagogies have yet to align themselves to the particular needs of queer women and girls who, as I have established, experience the unique oppression of overlapping homophobia and patriarchy. In order

² See Chapman et al., 2011; Rofes, 1989; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Uribe, 1993; Uribe, 1994.

to address the needs of this largely invisible population, my guidelines for teachers (see Chapter 5) both build off of and refine the existing practices of social justice educators.

In the following chapter, I outline another vein of individual and small-group practices that have successfully supported queer girls in their identity development and have aided the formation and definition of lesbian communities: gay and lesbian print cultures. I describe the importance of these cultures and provide a case study of one lesbian-feminist journal that will serve as a model for my guidelines in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: The History of Gay Print Cultures

This thesis uses the history of informal, print-based education as a model for supporting identity development and empowerment for queer girls. In the following pages, I summarize the role of language and writing in American gay, bisexual, and lesbian rights through the Twentieth Century. I then describe lesbian-feminist print cultures of the 1960s to 1980s, followed by a case study of a lesbian-feminist journal.

During World War Two, homosexuality gained visibility as a taboo identity. Psychiatric evaluations and army interrogations about same-sex attractions were the first time many gay men and lesbians acknowledged their sexual orientation and learned that there were others with the same attractions. Ironically, antigay army policies themselves “weakened the barriers that had kept gay people trapped and hidden at the margins of society” (Bérubé, 2008, p. 255). Many soldiers found that, given their proximity to others of the same sex and freed of parental surveillance, the army was the easiest context in which to identify oneself as gay, to find and form gay communities, and to consummate one’s sexual identity. (Bérubé, 2008).

The return to civilian life at the end of the war provided gay men and women with unprecedented experiences to explore and publicize their sexual orientation. Many gay veterans leaned on their wartime communities during this transition and, finding it impossible to fit into their former communities, migrated to large cities where they could enjoy relative anonymity. Many found the task of “coming out” to family and friends significantly less daunting compared to their experiences of combat. Those men and women whom the army had dishonorably discharged due to their homosexuality, however, faced heightened discrimination after the war. The fight for these veterans’

recognition and pardon was the beginning of the ongoing fight for gay rights in the United States. (Bérubé, 2008).

Language and the written word—especially print—were important tools for gay and bisexual youth. During World War Two, gay soldiers used coded “camp slang” to identify one another and communicate about sexuality in a protected manner (Bérubé, 2008, p. 86). After the war, writing allowed discharged veterans to protest their dishonorable status through letter-writing and, in some cases, newspaper editorials. For others, personal letters were the safest way to come out as gay to family members and friends (Bérubé, 2008, p. 236-53). In these ways, language and writing have played a significant historical role in the ability of gay, bisexual, and lesbian individuals to form community and advocate for themselves.

As 1950 approached, public sentiment surrounding homosexuality intensified. Accompanying anticommunist sentiments was a focus on cultural conformity and the “ideal” American lifestyle to which gay individuals represented a serious threat. Psychologists redefined homosexuality as “sexual psychopathy,” and media began to portray gay individuals as violent pedophiles (Bérubé, 2008). This demonization of homosexuality allowed for overt persecution of gay men and lesbians, and Senator Clyde Hoey led the “Lavender Scare” in which 10,000 federal employees lost their jobs because of their actual or suspected sexual orientation. Additionally, police regularly raided LGBTQ bars and clubs for sodomy arrests (Bérubé, 2008, p. 257-71; Blackler, 2011; Soares, 1998; M. Thompson, 1994).

Such a hostile environment wore heavily on gay men and women. Many internalized the oppressive narratives that positioned homosexuals as untrustworthy and

predatory, becoming suspicious of and isolated from others of the same sexuality. However, some LGBTQ men and women resisted these narratives, organizing communities that offered education and connection. Some of the earliest gay rights organizations—including the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB)—served to educate gay and lesbian individuals about their rights regarding police harassment, self-expression, and workplace discrimination (Soares, 1998; M. Thompson, 1994). Further, these organizations sparked the development of gay and lesbian print cultures of the 1960s and 1970s that provided important forms and places of education for LGBTQ youth.

Students of the mid-twentieth century faced severe taboos surrounding identities that fell outside of heterosexual gender norms. Additionally, survival often required LGBTQ youth to learn to pass as members of the dominant (heterosexual) group, making these students relatively invisible. Well into the 1980s, adults did not recognize the existence of gay and bisexual youth due to the dominant ideology that teens were naturally straight and become gay only when exposed to or “recruited” by adults of deviant sexuality. (Johnson, 2007; Paechter, 1998; Rofes, 1989; Uribe, 1994). Even before the development of gay and lesbian print cultures, many gay, bisexual, and questioning students turned to informal self-education in order to learn about their identities and communities. For example, activist Bonnie Morris (2016) had difficulty exploring and developing her sexual identity as a public high school student in the 1960s. Even from a very young age, Morris (2016) was aware that some piece of her identity was absent from her schooling. She describes the essential role that “tomboy literature” played in her developing sense of self: she and countless other LGBTQ girls

found themselves reflected in tomboy protagonists such as Harriet the Spy, and they found hope in female characters who explicitly challenged traditional gender roles by romping in the mud, putting themselves in dangerous situations, and prioritizing mystery-solving over male attention and approval. She writes,

Tomboy literature in the early to mid-1960s featured scores of these girls named Muffin and Rusty, who not only occupied the empowered girl space between childhood and teen young-ladyness, but also appeared as literary characters during America's reluctant transition from absolute sexism to feminist consciousness. (B.J. Morris, 2016, p. 6)

As she came to terms with her sexual orientation in later adolescence, Morris and her cousin would take secret after-school trips to the library, spending hours hunting for any mention of the word “lesbian” (2016, p. 4-6). “I stopped going to classes,” Morris writes, “I started going to the library to find out what it meant to be homosexual” (2016, p. 120).

Although most available books in late twentieth-century libraries presented homosexuality as a psychological disorder or perversion, libraries remained essential sources of information for students who were intent on finding reflections of themselves in literature. According to Morris, queer people of this era began a “legacy of lesbian knowledge sleuths and underground archivists” (B.J. Morris, 2016, p. 120). Morris's story illustrates the essential role that written word has historically played for LGBTQ youth. Thus print media—be it young adult fiction or other forms of writing—has long provided a space for gay and lesbian students to learn about LGBTQ figures and to see themselves and their identity reflected in a wide range of roles.

Similarly, early gay rights organizations became crucibles of LGBTQ intellectual life and publications. The Mattachine Society and the DOB sent out

publications—originally formatted as newsletters—beginning in the early 1950s. These newsletters set the precedent for what would become, by the 1970s, a rich print culture featuring a variety of publications, from internationally-focused and intellectually rigorous magazines such as *The Body Politic*, to politically neutral newspapers such as *The Advocate*, and radical community-run zines like *The Leaping Lesbian* (Downs, 2016; M. Thompson, 1994; Adams, 1998; The Leaping Lesbian Collective, 1977-1980).

Beyond periodicals and zines, the 1970s gay publishing movement brought with it an influx of books by gay and lesbian authors. These works illuminated long-silenced gay and lesbian histories. They increased visibility of non-straight characters, and provided mental and emotional support for those struggling with a marginalized identity. Publications of this era took every form, from plays such as Jonathan Ned Katz's *Coming Out!*, historical texts like Katz's *Gay American History*, as well as novels, memoirs, guides, and poetry anthologies. (Downs, 2016, p. 76-102).

While the volume of print media by and about LGBTQ culture drastically increased during the 1970s, the quintessential hub of LGBTQ community education was the bookstore. In 1967, the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop (New York) became America's first official gay bookstore (Downs, 2016, p. 66). While the store sold any LGBTQ-related literature that founder Craig Rodwell could find, a bigger goal was to create an intellectual and cultural center where men and women could safely read, discuss, and explore what it meant to be gay (Downs, 2016). The Oscar Wilde Memorial was the first of many bookshops with this dual purpose: to provide literature that would aid LGBTQ individuals on their journey to self-acceptance and -understanding, and to facilitate the development of gay identity and culture (Downs,

2016). Further, bookstores served as a point of community entry for questioning gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and as a politicizing force for those who wanted exposure to activism (B.J. Morris, 2016).

Lesbian-feminist print cultures

The second wave feminist and women's liberation movements grew alongside gay liberation. Lesbian activists, however, found themselves marginalized between these parallel movements. Historical accounts both implicitly and explicitly make it clear that "gay publishing" was for the most part "gay male publishing"—lesbians and other queer women are almost entirely absent from the discussion except as an aside (Downs, 2016; B.J. Morris, 2016; M. Thompson, 1994). Lesbian activists took on the burden of educating gay men about sexism and male privilege, though gay and bisexual women continued to find their needs and interests absent from mainstream gay activism despite their efforts. Similarly, mainstream feminist publishing movements overtly excluded lesbian activists in order to make their messages more palatable to a general audience (Adams, 1998). Lesbian-feminists were aware of their intersectional identities, which Morris describes as the "different set of issues [that] had as much to do with *being* the female as *liking* the female" (2016, p. 14). This awareness motivated lesbian activists to sculpt their own spaces. Embodied both in physical places and print cultures, these spaces fostered discussion about and empowerment of the lesbian identity. Thus came the lesbian-feminist. (Adams, 1998; B.J. Morris, 2016).

Lesbian-feminist publishing began with the DOB's journal *The Ladder* in San Francisco in 1955. The journal originally took an "integrationist" stance: it sought to lessen lesbians' feelings of isolation and alienation by teaching them how to adapt and

blend into mainstream culture (Soares, 1998, p. 30-33). However, integrationist lesbian publishing was short-lived. With the societal unrest of the 1960s, both gay rights and feminist movements became increasingly vocal and radical within print media. Soares explains:

While *The Ladder*'s growth paralleled the emergence of an identity, a culture, and a movement, its demise signaled an important cultural shift. From a hidden, marginalized group, gay women transformed themselves into a proud and vocal part of both the gay and women's liberation movements. (1998, p. 47)

Lesbian-exclusive publishing became a means through which queer women could create space for themselves, their identities, their voices, and their communities within the public eye (Adams, 1998).

Lesbian-feminist publishing arose alongside a shift in feminist ideology from "radical" to "cultural." Whereas radical feminists worked to disrupt socially constructed gender differences, cultural feminists of the 1960s and '70s sought to elevate womanhood as distinct from manhood (Echols, 1989). As a result, lesbian-feminist writings from this era tend to celebrate femininity and essentialist womanhood, albeit a form of femininity distinct from that created by patriarchal culture and defined by women themselves (Echols, 1989; The Leaping Lesbian Collective, 1977-1980). This emphasis on the essential nature of womanhood allowed lesbian-feminists to narrowly define femaleness, and lesbian-feminist print cultures often excluded the experiences of transgender women, women of color, and/or bisexual women (The Leaping Lesbian Collective, 1977-1980). I recognize, therefore, the limitations and flaws of the lesbian-feminist publishing movement. However, this publishing movement represents an immense push towards legitimizing and making visible queer female identities. Further,

many young queer women relied on lesbian-feminist printing as an unprecedented source of community and of support for identity development (Adams, 1998; Echols, 1989). Many positive aspects of lesbian-feminist print cultures are worth considering when devising fully inclusive educational practices.

One fundamental aspect of lesbian-feminist publishing was the creed that “personal is political” (Echols, 1989). Feminist and gay rights movements had long relied on the politicization of the personal sphere, in part because the institutions these movements sought to resist had already politicized personal behaviors (e.g. legal and police efforts to prohibit gay sexual relations). As a result, gay and lesbian activism, particularly that embodied in print cultures, actively sought to bring gay and lesbian perspectives on love and sex into the political sphere. In other words, “The risk of turning one’s own individual coming-to-consciousness into speech and then into action is acknowledged, encouraged, and celebrated” in feminist publishing. (Adams, 1998, p. 121). This goal is evident in many lesbian-feminist publications, which featured articles on lesbian motherhood, religious practices, and political factors affecting personal relationships and decisions. (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Pearson, 2016; Soares, 1998). Lesbian-feminist publishing lent an unprecedented level of visibility to queer women and their personal as well as political struggles.

Along with increased visibility, lesbian-feminist communities gained the power to foster “lesbian-owned businesses, cultural events, information networks, and radical scholarship” (B.J. Morris, 2016, p. 116). Women’s-only spaces and events came in the form of bookstores, concerts, coffee-shops, and music festivals. Adams (1998) understood women-only spaces as not only complementary to but also central to

lesbian-feminist publishing; publications were only one of many spaces that excluded men and therefore made it possible for women to escape patriarchal oppression as they expressed themselves and brainstormed steps toward long-term equity. Similarly, physical women-only spaces provided a rare opportunity for lesbians to feel safe in the absence of men and to support women's endeavors and businesses free from male influence. ("Boogie on Oasis" in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(2), 1977, p. 12). Concerts and music festivals were especially popular women-only sites, The Michigan Women's Music Festival (MWMF) being perhaps the most prominent example. The MWMF hosted lesbian musicians whose songs contained celebrations of love between women, protests against male-centric art and business, and declarations of commitment to lesbian separatism. These events served as educational spaces in the sense that they taught and enforced the values of radical lesbian-feminist communities.

However, radical values were not consistent throughout lesbian-feminist communities. For example, musician Alix Dobkin was well-known for her severe separatist beliefs—in other words, the position that lesbians could and should leave in complete separation from men in order to protect themselves from gendered heterosexism. Dobkin refused to perform with any male audience members present, including the male children of lesbian mothers, describing her commitment to women-only spaces by insisting that young children—regardless of their gender—were not women and therefore were not welcome at her performances. (Hostetler and Brown in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(9), 1977, p. 3-6). Dobkin's popularity, particularly among Michigan's lesbian-feminist circles, speaks to the significance of her position on women-only spaces. On the other hand, many artists performed for any audience they

could reach because they prioritized spreading women's music to a larger audience over conforming to separatist expectations. Some community members understood the impact of strict separatist policies on mothers, worried that such policies would alienate a significant portion of the lesbian-feminist population from musical and cultural events. While some organizations attempted to compromise between those who preferred women-only events and those who did not, this form of extreme separatism continued to create an ideological divide within the lesbian-feminist community. (Pearson, 2016). Significantly, these discussions did not mention or account for the presence of transgender women.

Regardless of ideological conflicts, women's publishing and lesbian-specific publishing of the 1970s provided an important space for informal education that was unavailable to students in formal educational institutions such as public schools. Print cultures, in particular, allowed lesbian and bisexual youth both to consume information about others with similar identities and to contribute their own ideas in ways that fostered healthy, safe, and supported identity creation. Given the existing information about what was successful for supporting youth identity development, lesbian-feminist print cultures are important models for formal educational practices. In order to illustrate the particular successes of these print cultures, I consider a case study of one lesbian-feminist publication: Ann Arbor, Michigan's *Leaping Lesbian*.

Case Study: *The Leaping Lesbian*

Ann Arbor, Michigan has long been the home of a thriving women's activist and gay community. In 1977, a collective of Ann Arbor lesbian-feminists printed the first issues of *The Leaping Lesbian*, a periodical containing discussions about political and

personal issues that defined these writers' experiences as women. A case study of *The Leaping Lesbian* reveals the rhetoric used in lesbian-feminist publishing to challenge traditional definitions of womanhood as Other to and dependent upon manhood. Most of *The Leaping Lesbian* contributors wrote anonymously or identified themselves only by first name; this allowed for contributors to speak openly and without fear about their sexual identity in a time of heightened discrimination and homophobia. The following paragraphs analyze how contributors to *The Leaping Lesbian* discussed lesbian identity using language surrounding three primary themes: first, women's culture production; second, matriarchal spirituality; third, motherhood. Finally, I describe the structure of *The Leaping Lesbian* as an open forum that supported healthy identity development for queer female youth. I argue that *The Leaping Lesbian* may serve as a model for social justice education.

Perhaps the most common topic in *The Leaping Lesbian* was the production of entertainment and art by and for women. *The Leaping Lesbian* supported women's culture by promoting "local lesbian poets, musicians, artists, therapists, radio shows, and rock bands" (Bieritz in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(3), 1977, p. 8) and by printing reviews of women-made concerts, festivals, and writing. In these writings, contributors to *The Leaping Lesbian* revealed their expectations that the products of women's culture cohere to several values, the most important being explicit politicism, independence from men's art and culture, and authenticity to the experiences of women and lesbians. In a time where women were often restricted to supporting roles, lesbian-feminist writers sought to instead create a culture that placed women primarily as leading actresses. They redefined women's role within the entertainment and art industries,

recognizing women as valuable performers and creators of culture whose voices deserved to be heard. In the words of Laurie Gold, women were proud “to be creating, and supporting, our own culture... It felt good to see women only performing music, engineering sound and lighting” in complete independence from men (Gold in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(7), 1977, p. 4). Yet women’s culture was not the only area in which contributors sought independence from men.

Writers for *The Leaping Lesbian* also frequently addressed spirituality and religion. Terry Artibee, *The Leaping Lesbian*’s spirituality columnist, portrayed the desire to overthrow patriarchal religions and challenge portrayals of women as outsiders in a men’s world. Artibee advocated for Wicca and witchcraft as feminist spiritual systems in which women were life-givers connected to a universal creative force.³ Artibee used rhetoric surrounding mythologized ancient cultures “in which women held secular power along with religious power” (Faderman, 1991, p. 227). This narrative critiqued mainstream patriarchal religions, like Christianity, for being fundamentally violent and hierarchical, and for defining spiritual authority as separated from and inaccessible to common people, particularly women (Artibee in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(2), 1977, p. 9).

Artibee’s articles also portrayed worship of an abstract “Goddess”: a “Life-Force within each of us and all that exists” (Artibee in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1, 1977, p. 10). These articles encouraged women to recognize “the goddess within each of us,” a view of womanhood starkly contradictory to “this Christian crap where women are

³ For examples of Artibee’s rhetoric surrounding Goddess-worship and wiccan ritual, see: Terry Artibee, “A Budapest Event (Part Two)” in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(3), 1977, p. 19-21; “Mother Nature and the Witches’ Thanksgiving,” *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(8), 1977, p. 13-4.

either whores or virgins, and the only way they are identified is through [heterosexual] sex” (Hostetler in *The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(2), 1977, p. 9). Thus these systems of spirituality seek to redefine women as the primary possessors of ancient knowledge and spiritual power.

This rhetoric reveals a surprisingly traditional understanding of womanhood in which motherhood, nurturance, and emotional intuition were central. However, writers addressing spirituality sought to reframe these traits in a way that lent women power rather than restricting their behavior. Contributors to *The Leaping Lesbian* reclaimed these traditional traits of femininity in order to prove that women were inherent possessors of spiritual knowledge and power, thereby placing women at the top of the spiritual hierarchy of which they had long occupied the bottom.

Closely tied to this discussion of spirituality was *The Leaping Lesbian*’s complex narratives surrounding motherhood. While writers recognized the bond between mother and child as a deeply personal one, they also recognized the role of reproduction and motherhood in widespread mainstream gender roles and definitions of womanhood. For the most part, writers adopted one of two views of motherhood: On the one hand, writers described motherhood as a positive and defining aspect of womanhood, an undeniable right of all women; on the other hand, radical lesbian-feminists portrayed motherhood as an expectation of patriarchy used to restrict women and define them as dependent upon men.⁴

⁴ Discussions of motherhood can be found in nearly every issue throughout the first two volumes of the *Leaping Lesbian* (Volume 1, no. 2 through volume 2, no. 3), 1977-1978.

In the former case, writers for the *Leaping Lesbian* frequently defended lesbians' right to motherhood through articles about local custody trials. On the surface, reports of custody trials were a political project aimed at revealing the discrimination facing lesbian mothers in court. However, on another level, they spoke also to the writers' belief that motherhood played a central role in the identity of womanhood. For example, one article began with the statement (in all capital letters):

MYTH: LESBIANISM AND MOTHERHOOD ARE
CONTRADICTIONS IN TERMS. FACT: ALTHOUGH MOST
LESBIAN MOTHERS ARE HIDING BECAUSE THEY MAY LOSE
THEIR CHILDREN, ABOUT ONE OUT OF EVERY THREE
LESBIANS IS A MOTHER AND MORE LESBIANS ARE
EXPRESSING THE DESIRE TO HAVE CHILDREN. (*The Leaping
Lesbian* 1(2), 1977, p. 4)

This and other articles argued that lesbian mothers shape their identity, in part, around their relationship with their children.

The *Leaping Lesbian*, however, also published lesbian separatist views of motherhood that directly contradicted those presented in articles surrounding custody trials. Extreme separatism writers described motherhood as incompatible with lesbian-feminism and accused lesbian mothers as shirking their political duties. Julie Lauren Morris, the subject of one "Dyke Profile," spoke to the logic behind this rejection: "Male society urges all women to have children by saying women aren't whole until they do. Once the children are born, society uses that as one of its major tools of oppression. It uses the child to bind the woman to her home and man" (*The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(2), 1977, p. 6). In other words, the expectation of motherhood was one means of enforcing patriarchal heterosexuality on women.

Clearly the opinions printed in *The Leaping Lesbian* were sometimes very deeply at odds. How did the Collective integrate such contradictory viewpoints? It appears, in reviewing the many voices and ideologies featured within the periodical's pages, that *The Leaping Lesbian* served as a written-word forum. In the words of the Collective, "Our policy so far has been to print everything we receive from a woman; this would help to create an open forum of ideas and opinions" (*The Leaping Lesbian*, 1(7), 1977, p. 1). Thus the goal of *The Leaping Lesbian* was not to present and enforce one point of view or political ideology, but to create a dialogue between women of all backgrounds and political alignments about what it meant to be a woman. The Collective recognized that such an open acceptance policy could compromise the literary quality of the journal. However, this forum-like approach to publishing served the purpose of creating a space in which discussions surrounding womanhood and the identity of lesbianism could thrive. Ultimately, *The Leaping Lesbian* was dedicated to creating a platform where women had the power to reject patriarchal definitions of womanhood and redefine the lesbian identity.

Implications for Formal Education

By the mid-1990s, lesbian-feminist publications and women-only spaces had largely disappeared. Even the word "lesbian,"⁵ which activists had worked to legitimize as "the one identity that suggested an orientation toward women alone" (B.J. Morris, 2016, p. 15), had returned to a tabooed state, evident in the fact that even young women

⁵ For an etymological discussion of the word "lesbian" and its history, see Blank, P. (2011). The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice. *Modern Philology*, 109(1), 108-134.

who associate with lesbianism resist referring to themselves as “lesbian” (Uribe & Harbeck, 1993, p. 23). This shift away from lesbian identification suggest a backlash to the liberating efforts of 1970s lesbians (B.J. Morris, 2016). Despite the reason for such a shift, today’s adolescents cannot draw upon the same literacy-centered communities that functioned so successfully for queer youth of the 1960s through ‘80s.

Nevertheless, identity authorship continues to occur through reading and writing (Blackburn, 2002), meaning that language arts teachers have a unique opportunity to encourage and facilitate healthy identity development. Many queer women and activists point to writing, particularly poetry, as an powerful process in developing a queer, female identity. As Audre Lorde explains, “I speak... of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience... For women, then, poetry is not a luxury” (1984, p. 37). Similarly, Christensen & Watson (2015) assert: “Poetry means taking control of the language of your life” (p. iv). Thus teachers in language arts and writing settings may encourage, support, and empower students through identity development in a way that other teachers cannot. According to Chapman and associates:

A social justice approach to writing fosters an awareness of societal challenges that affect students' families, communities, and the larger society. It affirms students' multiple identities, creates solidarity among peers, builds students' abilities to respond to and embrace supportive criticism of their work, and targets authentic audiences for their finished products. (2011, p. 539)

My analysis of *The Leaping Lesbian*—as well as all lesbian-feminist print culture—reveals important tenants of community-led publication in which queer women and girls can step out of their typical position of marginalization and invisibility. Given the capacity of language arts instruction to facilitate identity development, social justice educators can integrate these tenants into their classrooms. Despite the absence of

women of color, bisexual women, and transgender women in lesbian-feminist publications, it is possible to adapt the positive structures of *The Leaping Lesbian* to the needs of all queer girls in the classroom, regardless of their race, non-binary gender identity, and specific sexual orientation. Accordingly, I have identified five key features of success in *The Leaping Lesbian* that can be translated to formal education settings: (1) the possibility of sharing one's thoughts and experiences while maintaining anonymity; (2) the expression of contradictory opinions without personal conflict or danger; (3) the personal, quotidian nature of the article topics, which lends every contributor equal standing and authority regardless of her prior knowledge or education; (4) the assurance that other members of the community have had similar experiences, feelings, and ideas; (5) a community that continually evolves but maintains long-term structure and consistent values. These key features shape the guidelines that appear in Chapter 5.

Unlike in *The Leaping Lesbian*, not every text a teacher assigns in class can or should focus specifically on the lesbian identity. Teachers must be able to evaluate the worth of a text before assigning it to their students. In the next chapter, I illustrate the importance of texts and literature content in the classroom. Further, I analyze the heteronormative and patriarchal narratives that appear in popular middle grade readings.

Chapter 4: Disrupting Gendered Heteronormative Narratives

The material students read influences their vision of the world and of themselves (Birden, 2005; Blackburn, 2002; Blackler, 2011; Burdge et al., 2013; Chapman et al., 2011; Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Fennema, 1976; Hickman, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2016; Sadker et al., 2009; Paechter, 1998). Assigned readings carry the extra weight of being endorsed by an adult and, supposedly, the educational institution. When the novels, poetry, and nonfiction that middle schoolers read maintain narratives of gendered heteronormativity, students begin to accept these narratives as truth. Narratives enforce gendered heteronormativity by placing straight, male characters at the center of the plot, painting LGBTQ characters in a bad light or not at all, and maintaining traditional gender roles and characteristics.

In this chapter, I analyze the ten books most read by middle school students. In these analyses, I ask questions such as: Who are the main characters in this book? What traits do male or female characters exhibit? What roles do characters of each gender play? Do gendered traits and roles overlap, or is there a clear divide between masculinity and femininity? Who acts, and who observes? Appendices A and B contain the forms used to identify and analyze gendered heteronormative narratives. Though there has been no research showing definitively which books middle school teachers assign most often, I combined information from multiple sources to compile a list of the ten books that sixth through eighth graders are most likely to read, both assigned and by choice (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010b; Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2016; Shanahan & Duffett, 2013). Out of these ten books, I complete a close reading and analysis of the top six: *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, *The*

Giver by Lois Lowry, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play* by Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, and *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. The remaining four books contribute to a summarized overview of middle school books at the end of the chapter. For suggested classroom discussion questions relating to these books, see Appendix C.

The Lightning Thief

The most popular middle school book is Rick Riordan's (2005) *The Lightning Thief*. Despite its appeal to this age group, *The Lightning Thief* presents troubling narratives about gender, particularly about boyhood and youth. Namely, Riordan presents an androcentric world in which preteen boys are capable of and responsible for literally saving the world. In this novel, Percy Jackson is a twelve-year-old troubled student who discovers that he is the son of the Greek god Poseidon. He takes on the task of locating Zeus's master lightning bolt, the theft of which has started a feud between the gods so intense that it threatens all life on Earth. Along with fellow demigod Annabeth and his friend Grover, Percy travels to the underworld to save his mother from Hades, then battles and defeats Ares in order to recover Zeus's lightning bolt and save the world.

Subtly, *The Lightning Thief* propagates gendered heteronormative gender roles. With Percy as the first-person narrator, Riordan authors the world of adventure and heroism as an inherently masculine world, marginalizing female characters. Though according to reviewer Follos (2008), Percy is a perfectly relatable teen—a protagonist whose familial and scholarly struggles are accessible to the novel's target age group---

Percy's heroism is rooted in traditionally masculine characteristics: assertiveness, short-temper, impulsiveness, and obsessive protectiveness of those around him. These are traits that mainstream sexist culture discourages in girls and expects of boys. Thus *The Lightning Thief* teaches its female readers that "hero" is an essentially male role.

Additionally, *The Lightning Thief* enforces sexist narratives by placing female characters in marginal, domestic, and negative roles. Women appear as bullies, thieves, mean teachers, mothers, sidekicks, sexualized nymphs, demons, and monsters.

Meanwhile, male characters include gods, sages, mentors, protectors, guards, and disembodied powers (such as the evil power Kronos). Greek gods are present and essential in the story, while goddesses appear as a footnote and never directly appear in Percy's experience. Further, the novel maintains a cultural construction of femininity that is inherently heterosexual. Riordan depicts female characters having romantic relationships and crushes (e.g. Annabeth is infatuated with another demigod; Percy's mom is clearly heterosexual), yet male characters do not have romantic interests. Percy especially appears to be too independent to concern himself with romance. In this way, Riordan authors female characters who are insignificant and conceptually dependent on male characters.

Percy's family dynamic further illustrates these gender roles. His mother is nurturing, but weak to the point of childishness. Despite being an actual child himself, Percy takes responsibility for protecting his mother and rescuing her from Hades. The mother is also the only major character to have romantic relationships—first her liaison with Poseidon, Percy's father, and then in her marriage to Percy's abusive, cruel stepfather. In her heterosexual relationships, Percy's mother appears weak, unable to

stand up for herself and easy to take advantage of to the extent that her teenage son feels he must intervene on her behalf. In this way, Riordan strengthens his portrayal of sexist gender roles through Percy's mother's heterosexuality. At the same time, Percy gains status from his father (one of the "Big Three Gods"), while children of the goddesses do not achieve the same status from their mothers.

In summary, *The Lightning Thief* may engage students in a fun, action-packed tale, but in order to do so, it also maintains harmful gendered heteronormative narratives. This dynamic is most clear at *The Lightning Thief's* pinnacle, when Percy fights and defeats Ares despite the fact that Ares is the God of War (and therefore combat) and Percy is a half-human child. During this fight scene, Percy's more feminine friends—Annabeth and Grover—watch from a distance, terrified for Percy's safety. This is just one example, albeit a particularly poignant one, of the narratives that teach young boys that they must act as adults with greatly exaggerated responsibilities. Meanwhile, girls learn to internalize their characterization as marginalized, inherently sexual, and/or despised. Absent from Riordan's story and excluded from the heteronormative definition of femininity that appears in *The Lightning Thief*, queer girls receive particularly harmful messages from this book.

The Giver

Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) has been among the most widely read American young adult novels for decades. Despite its popularity and critical acclaim, *The Giver* has also faced challenges of censorship and bans due to Lowry's references to difficult topics such as "infanticide, suicide, euthanasia, and other inappropriate content for its intended audience" (Freeman, 2016, p. 36).

The Giver takes place in a dystopian world in which the government constantly surveils its citizens in order to design the most comfortable and fitting possible life for each. Based on their observations, authorities assign an appropriate career for each child at the age of twelve. The protagonist, twelve-year-old Jonas, receives the most sacred job assignment: the Receiver. Jonas becomes responsible for taking all memories and knowledge of the outside world from the former Receiver, an old man now dubbed the Giver. As Jonas progresses in his training, he learns that his utopian home severely censors knowledge and numbs its citizens in order to protect them and keep them complacent. He ultimately escapes the society in a mission to free his fellow citizens from ignorance. *The Giver* contains complex narratives about gender and sexuality, which challenge certain sexist gender roles and maintains others. The novel also presents a deeply heteronormative perspective.

The Giver challenges sexist gender roles primarily through its portrayal of individuals in traditionally gendered careers. Male and female characters are equally likely to fill any jobs in Lowry's society, with the exception of the Giver, the Receiver, and Birthmothers. For example, Jonas's mother holds a position of high judicial status, while his father cares for newborn babies. Parenting responsibilities fall equally on mothers and fathers in a family. Further, Jonas's father violates many real-world expectations of masculinity by fulfilling traditionally maternal roles and being extremely nurturing and gentle. Further, Lowry's society values girls and boys on much the same characteristics: courage, integrity, thoughtfulness, self-reflection, wisdom, intelligence, gentleness, and serenity.

However, the exceptional cases of traditional gender roles in *The Giver* happen to be particularly powerful. For example, the job of Birthmother is presumably of utmost importance, being the only source of reproduction in the society. Yet Lowry describes Birthmothers as shameful and low-status workers within the society! Jonas's family looks down on these women, describing them as lazy and greedy. On the other end of the career spectrum, the most uplifted and revered positions are that of Giver and Receiver, and these jobs appear always to be filled by male characters. The only exception is the last youth chosen to be a Receiver before Jonas, a girl named Rosemary. Shortly into her training, Rosemary failed because she was unable to contain the Giver's more painful memories. The society regards Rosemary's failure as an immense disgrace, so much so that the incident is hardly ever discussed. This subplot reveals Lowry's world to be one in which only boys and men are capable of bearing intense pain, and the result is that males may take responsibility for knowledge of the ancient world. In other words, men and only men own the outside world through their knowledge of it. This places men at the top of the society's spiritual and professional hierarchy.

At the same time, *The Giver* strictly maintains heterosexist narratives. For example, the process of family-building in Lowry's utopia reveals a deeply ingrained assumption of heterosexuality. The authorities who constantly observe and analyze each individual chooses a supposedly perfect partner for adults who request one. The same process occurs when a couple wants children. This process is so intentional that the committee refuses to assign some adults partners for years, if ever, because their perfects match does not exist. Yet *every* partnership consists of one woman and one

man, despite the fact that all children are adopted and thus families need not be heterosexual for reproductive reasons. In other words, even in a supposedly perfect matchmaking system, Lowry assumes it is impossible for ideal partners to be of the same gender. This subtext carries subtle but significant implications for queer and questioning teenager readers.

In summary, *The Giver* contains overt challenges to traditionally sexist gender roles, but in a less obvious way it also upholds harmful gendered heteronormative narratives. Like *The Lightning Thief*, *The Giver* places immense responsibility on a young boy, and therefore centers itself around the male experience. Again, there is a complete absence of lesbian or bisexual characters and issues, due to the heteronormative assumptions described above. While a discussion of these themes could be beneficial for disrupting gendered heteronormative narratives in a middle school class, to do so would require a class well-versed in the oppressive systems of sexism and homophobia and a highly skilled instructor.

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

Anne Frank began writing her diary in 1942. She was thirteen years old and her family had long ago emigrated to Holland as German anti-Semitism grew increasingly threatening. Shortly after she began writing, Anne and her family moved to a hidden annex attached to Mr. Frank's workplace. The Franks and another family, the van Daans, lived in the annex under strict rules in order to stay hidden for years. Anne continued her diary until 1944, when Nazi authorities discovered her family and sent them to separate concentration camps. Though the diary ended abruptly before Anne's capture, it is known that she and her sister went to the Bergen-Belsen work camp where

they eventually died of typhus, after which Mr. Frank discovered and published Anne's diary according to her wishes.

Anne had written openly about tabooed subjects such as sexuality, and publishers originally censored the diary in its early years of publication. However, modern unedited versions of the diary reveal Anne's surprisingly progressive thoughts about sex, menstruation, love, and women's rights. The 2002 Viking edition, for example, provides a powerful account of Anne's experience as a teenage girl questioning her sexuality, learning about her body, negotiating her place within family dynamics, and cultivating resilience despite the Holocaust. For these reasons, in the correct context, Anne's diary may serve to disrupt gendered heteronormative narratives and to support queer female students in their own identity development.

To some extent, Anne was a product of her environment—i.e. Nazi Germany—and her writing reflects common gender roles of the time. For example, Anne's relationship with her mother revealed how the former saw motherhood as a key aspect of proper womanhood. She wrote: "I imagine a mother as a woman who, first and foremost, possesses a great deal of tact, especially toward her adolescent children, and not one who, like Mumsie, pokes fun at me when I cry" (Frank, 2002, p. 159). Further, Anne developed her sense of womanliness by imagining the sort of mother she would be, and directly contrasting that image to her own mother. In romance, too, Anne expressed traditional ideals of femininity. For example, after beginning a relationship with Peter van Daan, she noted the appearance of a "second Anne, who's never over-confident or amusing, but wants only to love and be gentle" (Frank, 2002, p. 274). Further, she wrote, "I wish [Peter] were superior to me in nearly every way!" (Frank,

2002, p. 243). In these passages, Anne supported the gendered heteronormative narrative which defined womanhood with heterosexuality and submission.

In other passages, however, Anne clearly questioned and resisted sexist expectations. She critiqued the pattern that, in romantic matters, “it's always the man who takes the active role, and it's up to the woman to set the limits” (Frank, 2002, p. 277). In fact, Anne displayed immense agency in her romantic affairs. Before going into hiding, she wrote openly and proudly of the “throng of [male] admirers who can't keep their adoring eyes off me” (Frank, 2002, p. 7). She rejected or accepted these boys’ affections as she saw fit, and in the case of Peter van Daan, sometimes actively pursued those to whom she was attracted. Consciously or not, this behavior was a form of resistance to patriarchic expectations in which women were to be the passive, modest objects of male advances.

Moreover, Anne wrote outright about women’s rights and the oppression of sexism. In one passage, she reflected on the origins of male dominance, musing that it probably came from a time in which greater physical strength made was more valuable. She continued:

Until recently, women silently went along with this, which was stupid, since the longer it's kept up, the more deeply entrenched it becomes. Fortunately, education, work and progress have opened women's eyes... Women, who struggle and suffer pain to ensure the continuation of the human race, make much tougher and more courageous soldiers than all those big-mouthed, freedom-fighting heroes put together! ... I don't mean to imply that women should stop having children; on the contrary nature intended them to, and that's the way it should be. What I condemn are our system of values and the men who don't acknowledge how great, difficult, but ultimately beautiful women's share in society is. (Frank, 2002, p. 318-9)

This passage contains complex narratives. On the one hand, Anne maintained the notion that reproduction and motherhood were the most essential female traits, the most important female contribution. On the other hand, Anne revealed a surprisingly well-rounded understanding of the history of patriarchy and 20th century progress in women's rights, given her experience as a Jewish girl in Nazi Germany.

The Diary of a Young Girl is the only book I analyzed that dealt with LGBTQ issues or characters. While Anne did not refer explicitly to gay or lesbian individuals, her writing in some passages implies that she may have questioned her own heterosexuality. For instance, at one point she recalled a sleepover with her close friend, Jacqueline:

Once when I was spending the night at Jacque's, I could no longer restrain my curiosity about her body, which she'd always hidden from me and which I'd never seen. I asked her whether, as proof of our friendship, we could touch each other's breasts. Jacque refused. I also had a terrible desire to kiss her, which I did. Every time I see a female nude, such as the Venus in my art history book, I go into ecstasy. Sometimes I find them so exquisite I have to struggle to hold back my tears. If only I had a girlfriend! (Frank, 2002, p. 161)

Though Anne made no other mention of her attraction to girls after this quote, she appeared to feel quite strongly at this point. Further, Anne's depiction of sexual longing and attraction was more intense in this passage than in any description of her heterosexual romances. Clearly there is not enough evidence to draw any conclusions about Anne's sexual orientation, but this passage provides a powerful link by which queer and questioning readers may connect to other aspects of Anne's story. Further, the possible implications of Anne as an LGBT character in one of the most popular historical accounts of the Twentieth Century are immense. This passage provides a tool

in the facilitation of classroom discussions surrounding intersectionality during the Holocaust specifically and identity development in general.

The Diary of a Young Girl also provided accounts of Anne's sexual and bodily self-exploration. Anne wrote unembarrassedly of bodily functions as she entered puberty, including vaginal discharge and menstruation. Of the latter, Anne demonstrated acceptance and pride. She wrote, "Every time [I menstruate], I have a feeling that in spite of all the pain, discomfort, and mess, I'm carrying around a sweet secret" (Frank, 2002, p. 160). In another diary entry, Anne described in great detail what her genitals looked and felt like. This description was spurred on by a conversation in which Anne asked Peter what male sexual organs were like, and he provided her with an in-depth description. In some of these passages, Anne revealed a natural level of discomfort and nervousness; at the same time, Anne's matter-of-fact way of writing about these issues revealed her underlying curiosity, positivity, and admiration for her body, as well as her willingness to educate herself sexually when her parents were unwilling to do so.

Anne Frank's diary was personal and intimate, and one must consider that many of the most poignant passages she wrote may be uncomfortable for modern middle schoolers to read and discuss with their peers. Regardless of this potential discomfort, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* provides unique and much-needed opportunities for young people to learn about and discuss what it means to be a queer girl coming of age in an oppressive environment. Further, students reading *The Diary of a Young Girl* gain exposure to body positivity and girls may find a positive example of a young woman exploring her body with curiosity. In classes where discussing sex and

bodily functions is not appropriate, one might require students to read those passages at home and to reflect on them in writing rather than in person. Anne's story was an inherently intersectional one, and if handled with care, her diary may be a cornerstone of literary social justice education.

The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play

About a decade after the first publication of Anne Frank's diary, married couple Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich (1956) adapted Anne's story into a play. Rather than a personal, first-person account of identity development and resilience, the play tells the general story of the Frank family's life in hiding and their ultimate capture. Because the plot of the play is much the same as that of Anne's original diary, I do not analyze the events or character gender roles of the play. Instead, I focus on Goodrich and Hackett's version compares to Anne's original diary. The dramatized version may be more accessible to young readers—it is shorter and uses simpler language—but without Anne's perspective and narration, the tale loses its value as a social justice reading.

Hackett and Goodrich's (1956) adaptation presents Anne as a silly girl with very little agency. For example, instead of her purposefully pursuing Peter van Daan contrary to her parents' wishes—as we know Anne did in her original diary—the play presents their romance as serendipity with which Anne passively goes along according to the adults' encouragement. Further, the play omits all of Anne's thoughts on women's rights, sexuality, body positivity, and attraction to girls. Without Anne's straightforward and powerful descriptions of her own maturation, she appears in the play as a loveable, optimistic but silly supporting character. In other words, Hackett & Goodrich sacrifice

the powerful perspective of a young, possibly queer woman finding her own strength in an intensely oppressive environment in order to portray the more expected Holocaust tragedy with adults and male characters at the center.

The play also presents Anne's family dynamics in drastically different light than Anne herself does. Primarily, Hackett and Goodrich present Mrs. Frank as a much gentler, more loving mother than Anne does. The one time that Mrs. Frank loses her temper in the play, Mr. Frank remarks that he has never seen his wife act this way before; the authors make it clear that anger is uncharacteristic for Anne's mother. Along with these traditionally feminine traits, Anne's mother shows much more affection and closeness to Anne than appears in the diary. From the latter, we know that Anne's mother was deeply critical of Anne, often hurt her feelings, and favored Anne's sister Margot. Anne felt affection and trust for her father, but looked at her mother as a cruel and repulsive tyrant. In rewriting this relationship, Hackett and Goodrich chose to perpetuate the gendered heteronormative narrative in which a mother's bond with her children is her primary purpose, not to be broken or surpassed by the paternal relationship.

In summary, *The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play* is an inauthentic and heterosexist revision of Anne's incredibly powerful diary. The authors entirely eliminate Anne's perspective, voice, and agency—the very traits that make the original diary an excellent intersectional social justice reading. While the original diary offers young queer female readers both a reflection of their own identity development and model of self-reflection and resilience-building, the play offers no character or themes to which these readers can meaningfully connect. Given these differences, *The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play* is

not an adequate choice for assigned middle school reading, unless it is read intentionally in conjunction with and contrast to *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

In 1976, Mildred Taylor wrote *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. In part, the book was a response to the lack of Black characters that Taylor observed in her own childhood reading (Scales, 2003, p. 240). *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* tells the story of the Logans, a Black family experiencing racism in early Twentieth Century Mississippi. The book focuses on the coming-of-age process of narrator Cassie (the family's only daughter out of four children), whose maturation is defined by increasing awareness of the racial discrimination in her community. Though Cassie begins as a strong-voiced tomboy who does not hesitate to stand up for herself, she learns the danger of being an outspoken Black girl when the White men in her hometown become increasingly violent, threatening Cassie herself. Taylor's writing also portrays shifting family dynamics in these trying times, as Cassie's father comes home from his job as a physical laborer and Uncle Hammer temporarily moves into the family house. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* has often been censored or banned from school readings due to the violent nature of the racism portrayed. However, its realistic portrayal of systemic racism, and the position of a young Black girl as first-person narrator, make *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* a powerful tool for teaching about intersectional oppression.

While Taylor writes explicitly about institutional racism, the novel's account of gender and sexism is written less obviously into the cultural context portrayed. In other words, Taylor focuses on Cassie's identity as a Black child more than the fact that she is a female. Regardless, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* still provides information about the

experiences about young Black women and girls. For example, the structure and dynamics of the Logan family shift over time in a way that reveals the limited power of Black women outside of the home. Originally, the book portrays a highly matriarchic family structure. Cassie and her three brothers live on the family farm with their mother and grandmother, who act as the ultimate authority. The children show their Mama a reverence made of equal parts respect, love, and fear. As Cassie says, “Ain’t never no reason good enough to go disobey your mama” (Taylor, 1976, p. 86). Despite this respect, the women in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* fill roles clearly within the traditionally feminine domestic sphere; women appear as schoolteachers, storytellers, cooks, harvesters and food preparers, and community doctors. A major exception, Cassie’s Mama also acts as an activist within the Black community, organizing a boycott against a violent White man’s market.

Similarly, men in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* fill traditionally masculine roles. Male characters act as manual laborers, bus drivers, and financial authorities, and are subject to a patriarchal value system. In Taylor’s world, men are inherently violent, but they are also brave, able-bodied, intelligent, tall, and strong. Men dominate the public sphere, and also gauge their worth based on their position in an external economy. One remark illustrates this connection between manhood and financial value: “Up there [the North] I got me a *man*’s job and they pay me a *man*’s [emphasis added] wages for it” (Taylor, 1976, p. 166). This sentence portrays a Black man’s negotiation of his worth and masculinity in terms of his productivity, a powerful portrayal given the post-Reconstruction context. However, Taylor does not explicitly discuss this intersection of race and gender in post-slavery America.

Certain gender dynamic shifts over the course of the novel illustrate the limitations placed on Black women and girls. The novel begins with a focus on women and their experiences: the family is largely matriarchal, and Cassie navigates the world alongside her brothers with remarkable outspokenness, agency, and confidence. The novel gradually becomes more androcentric as Cassie's father, Uncle Hammer, and family friend Mr. Morrison move into the Logan house. These men take over financial issues and seize authority in household decision-making, while Cassie's Mama becomes a hair-braider rather than an educational activist. Similarly, Cassie goes from agent and subject to indirect observer. To illustrate this shift, consider the juxtaposition of one scene from the beginning of the novel with one at the end. In the beginning, Cassie confronts her White schoolteacher who has distributed heavily-used textbooks, handed down from wealthier White schools and with racial slurs written inside the cover. In this interaction, Cassie is outspoken, intolerant of the injustice facing her despite the consequences of her resistance. At the end of the novel, a lynch mob moves to hang a young Black boy in Cassie's community. During this event, Cassie stays home. She watches from the house as her family's field catches fire. Only second-hand and after the fact does she learn of the events that passed with the lynch mob and how the field caught fire. Though this shift occurs subtly, it may have significant implications regarding the experiences of Black womanhood—i.e. in Cassie's case, maturation corresponds to decreased agency and power.

While *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* does not call attention to system sexism as it does racism, it still provides the opportunity to introduce and explore themes of oppression and discrimination. Cassie's position as narrator and protagonist provides

the perspective necessary to discuss the intersectional oppression faced by Black women. However, adequately teaching this book requires caution and care for two reasons. One, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* contains intense and potentially upsetting accounts of racial violence. Students should have experience with respectfully discussing racism and racial violence before reading this book. Teachers should be aware of the self-care needs of students, particularly students of color, in reading such upsetting narratives. Two, this assignment requires care because to ignore the issues of intersectionality that Taylor presents would be a waste of the novel's potential, and discussing gender in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* requires teachers who are willing to unravel the complex cultural fabric from which Cassie's experiences are woven. Note, also, that there is absolutely no mention of queer individuals or issues in this novel.

The Outsiders

Published in 1967, *The Outsiders* tells the story of Ponyboy, a teenage "Greaser" and gang member. Despite its female author, *The Outsiders* is male-centric and presents sexist gender roles, particularly toxic masculinity and heteronormativity. In fact, S.E. Hinton has written that she

can't write from a female point of view... I've tried it, but I can't do it... I identified with the male culture... While I realize now I used to think I had a male mind, I think I just had a female mind that didn't conform to the female culture at that time. (Drew, 1997, p. 148)

This explanation reveals the extent to which women are taught to associate with male narratives while devaluing their own experiences and perspectives. Further, by writing from a "male point of view," Hinton perpetuates the objectification of women and narratives of violent, unemotional masculinity.

All main characters in *The Outsiders* are straight men and boys, most of whom are obsessed with being tough or “tuff” and creating macho man personas. The book presents men as inherently violent, self-preserving, and incapable of crying or admitting that they are hurt. Ponyboy values himself and his fellow Greasers on the bases of physical size, fighting ability, appearance—e.g. how old one looks in comparison to one’s age—and lack of emotion.

Further, heterosexuality is tightly linked to the Greaser image of masculinity. Hinton even uses anti-gay slurs in portraying this masculinity: after Ponyboy bleaches his hair, he complains, “I looked like a blasted *pansy* [emphasis added]. I was miserable” (1967, p. 80). According to these heterosexist gender roles, women appear only as objects to be attained, and those who collect the most “broads” gain status (Hinton, 1967, p. 63). Male characters see girls as property or territory to be defended, which becomes clear when Socs—members of the opposing, upper class gang—attack Ponyboy and his friend Johnny for spending time with a Soc girl. The attack is so intense that Johnny must shoot a Soc in self-defense.

Social class is also a significant topic in *The Outsiders*. Ponyboy sees himself and the other Greasers as victims of their low class standing, pointing out the elitist attitude which results in discrimination against Greasers. Meanwhile, they regard the wealthy Socs as the ultimate enemy. However, Ponyboy despises and disrespects Greaser girls, believing them to be unladylike, promiscuous, and crass. He does not recognize that these women face the same discrimination he does, along with the additional impact of sexism; Ponyboy instead looks at the women as objects to be attained, and regardless of their common struggle, he understands low-status women as

undesirable. This objectification may be particularly harmful to queer female readers from low-income backgrounds, who may feel devalued not only by Ponyboy's description of girls as objects meant for use by heterosexual males, but also by the dehumanizing portrayals of girls living in poverty.

In summary, *The Outsiders* presents rigidly sexist and heteronormative gender roles. The story focuses on male characters and issues, and female characters have no agency or even voice. LGBT characters and issues are nonexistent. Further, because the first-person narrator is a young man who glorifies the violence of gang activity, reading this book may encourage students to value and embrace traditional gender roles, including toxic masculinity and heterosexuality. Therefore this reading may be harmful to middle school readers' identity development unless they are well prepared to identify, analyze, and rewrite gendered heteronormative narratives.

Additional books and summary analyses

In addition to the six previous books, I completed a general reading and background analysis of four additional books: *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Greg Heffley's Journal* (Kinney, 2007); *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008); *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Twain, 1996); *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1962). Not all of these books are likely to be assigned or found in a language arts classroom, but they are popular among middle grader readers and therefore contain significant narratives and discourses to which these readers are exposed.

The following is true of all ten listed books: Three out of the ten authors were male, with six female and one book authored by a heterosexual couple. Further, nine out of the ten books' authors are heterosexual and/or married to a spouse of the opposite

gender (“About Madeleine L’Engle,” 2017; Anonymous, 2000; “About the Author,” 2018; Birden, 2005; Drew, 1997; Follos, 2008; Frank, 2002; Freeman, 2016; Hackett & Goodrich, 1956; Kinney, 2007; Renaissance Learning, 2016; Scales, 2003; “Suzanne Collins,” 2016; Twain, 1996). The only exception is Anne Frank, whose sexual orientation is up to interpretation as explained earlier. Similarly, *The Diary of a Young Girl* was the only book to mention LGBT people or issues, though its treatment of these topics is admittedly brief and somewhat vague. Anne Frank, again, was the only author to make explicit reference to sexism or women’s rights. While *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* made some reference to gender dynamics within racial tensions, Taylor never wrote of sexism outright. The other eight books make no mention whatsoever of women’s issues. A final note: *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* appears to have been, for years, one of the most popular books for middle school students to read outside of school. I did not include it in my analysis because it is less likely to appear in classrooms as an assigned reading, but because of its overwhelming popularity in this age group, the novel deserves a short mention. Within the first few pages, it is clear that *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* emphasizes traditional masculinity, particularly as defined by heterosexuality. Further, Kinney uses the word “sissy”—an anti-gay slur—on the very first page.

Though the ten most common readings for middle school students contain complex messages about gender and sexual orientation, they almost all fail to represent queer women and girls at all, let alone in positive and empowering roles. Several of these books—primarily *The Outsiders*, *The Lightning Thief*, *The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play*, and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*—naturalize and perpetuate gendered heteronormative

narratives in an outstandingly harmful manner, and I would not recommend assigning them as readings. However, regardless of whether students receive assignments for any of these books, they are likely to read some of them or to consume similar narratives elsewhere in their lives. For that reason, it is important for teachers to read and analyze both the books they assign and the books that their students choose independently to read. Only by analyzing these narratives and asking students to do the same can educators begin to interrupt the constant messaging that teens receive regarding their gender and sexuality, and to give students the skill of critical analysis of these messages. In Chapter Five, I illustrate how my findings in this and the previous chapters contribute to best teaching practices in middle school English language arts classes.

Chapter 5: Guidelines

The following guidelines are founded in and shaped by the interdisciplinary discussion provided across the previous chapters. Chapter 1 provided the theoretical background of social justice education upon which these guidelines are based and the assumptions about gendered and sexual orientation-based inequity within which the guidelines function. With an analysis of contemporary attempts at addressing gendered heteronormativity, Chapter 2 showed the importance of bottom-up initiatives beginning in the classroom. These initiatives may be the best way to transform heteronormative and sexist class culture, effectively establish inclusive curricula, and teach critical thinking skills. Chapter 3 determined the educational benefits of lesbian-feminist print cultures to be (1) the possibility of sharing one's thoughts and experiences while maintaining anonymity; (2) the expression of contradictory opinions without personal conflict or danger; (3) the personal, quotidian nature of the article topics, which lends every contributor equal standing and authority regardless of her prior knowledge or education; (4) the assurance that other members of the community have had similar experiences, feelings, and ideas; (5) a community that continually evolves but maintains long-term structure and consistent values. Chapter 4 provided examples of how an informed teacher can analyze, bring attention to, and subsequently disrupt gendered heteronormative narratives in common readings.

Based on these findings, I have created the following guidelines for middle school English language arts teachers. These guidelines fall under four themes: self-evaluation and self-reflection, forming healthy and productive classroom communities, rewriting narratives in explicit and implicit curricula, and assignments and readings.

Self-Reflection and Self-Education

- 1. Get video evidence:** All members of a stratified society, including teachers, have ingrained and often harmful beliefs and assumptions about sexual orientation and gender. Teachers may struggle to identify these subtle beliefs; meanwhile, they unknowingly teach students to replicate dominant narratives about LGBTQ individuals and girls. In order to evaluate their existing practices and develop anti-sexist, anti-homophobic pedagogies, teachers should videotape themselves in the classroom. When playing back the tapes, educators should look for subtle reinforcements of heteronormative patriarchy: Who receives the majority of teacher attention? Who answers questions and provides answers? Where does the teacher direct and orient her body, and who occupies the most common “blind spots?” Do female and male students exhibit different body language? Is there unequal enforcement of rules for different students? Appendix D contains further tools for self-evaluation and -reflection. (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Sadker et al., 2009, p. 26; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).
- 2. Become a lifelong learner:** Everyone has knowledge gaps, particularly regarding marginalized groups. In response to inclusive curricular initiatives, teachers point to their lack of background knowledge as a primary obstacle in compliance (Abraham, 1998). In order create truly inclusive curricula, to address students’ questions about gender and sexual inequity, and to take full advantage of teachable moments within the classroom, educators must commit to life-long learning. This requires seeking out information that patriarchal and heteronormative systems purposefully obscure, such as the historical oppression of gay and lesbian Americans and the work of

women that has long been wrongly been attributed to men. (Cruz & Groendal-Cobb, 1998).

3. **Wield your positionality:** Intersecting identities lend each educator a unique position of combined powers and oppressions. Male teachers often have credibility within their workplace—particularly in the eyes of male higher-ups—to a degree that women do not. Heterosexual teachers are not at risk for job loss when speaking openly about their sexual orientation, nor do they face accusations—wielded by parents against many gay and bisexual teachers—that they intend to “recruit” or make students gay by teaching about sexuality. In other words, male and heterosexual teachers have the power, and therefore the responsibility, both to initiate conversations about gendered heterosexuality in their classrooms and to support their queer and female colleagues. For queer educators who do not face job insecurity, being “out” in their class and school communities can provide questioning and queer students with a positive adult role model. When middle school teacher Eric Rofes (2005) came out to his students, he discussed his own identity development process in ways that helped both his heterosexual and non-heterosexual students better understand themselves and relate to their teacher. (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Rofes, 2005).
4. **Listen to your students:** Social justice education attempts to position students, rather than parents or governments, as the clients served by schools. According to this view, educators are accountable first and foremost to their students. Giving anonymous, written surveys allows students to voice any concerns or suggestions they might have and to clearly communicate their needs. Allowing students to

complete sentence prompts may be a successful way to gather open-ended but manageable feedback (e.g. “I wish my teacher knew _____; I feel most/least comfortable in class when _____) (Hicks, 2016).

5. **Take the lead:** Teachers who are confident in their social justice practices and knowledge must take on leadership roles if they wish to see a shift in their overall school culture. While it is important to transform individual classrooms and pedagogies for the better, queer and/or female students—as well as those belonging to other marginalized groups—benefit most when all teachers and spaces are similarly transformed. Competent and confident social justice educators can make their practices visible and accessible to fellow teachers and staff members, take leadership roles in staff committees on discipline, curricula, and community-building traditions, and advocate for social justice-oriented professional trainings.

Classroom Community

1. **Gauge existing bias and beliefs:** By the middle grades, most students have developed, secured, and normalized their attitudes and beliefs about different social groups. Therefore, it is more difficult for middle school students to question and identify their own biases than it is for younger students. Early into the school year, teachers can evaluate students’ existing cultural knowledge about gender and sexual orientation through group brainstorming activities (see Appendix E for a transcript of one such activity featured in *It’s Elementary!*). While it is important for all students to have space and time to explore their beliefs—and where those beliefs come from—it is also essential that voicing such beliefs does not create a hostile and silencing environment for queer girls. As a class, developing “rules” or

agreements about what respectful, open-minded discourse looks like can help to develop of tone of nonjudgmental curiosity before such sensitive conversations begin. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016, Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996).

- 2. Build trust:** Most middle school students are focused on and concerned about issues of social status, such as aligning and misaligning with various groups and creating social value systems. Thus participation in middle school classrooms can be feel like high-risk social interaction. Queer and/or female students, whose identities carry less status, experience this risk to an elevated degree. As a result, teachers must purposefully build trust both with and between their students. One may build trust by explicitly and consistently naming the classroom as safe space in which students may honestly speak their minds without judgement or punitive discipline. Further, educators must validate middle schoolers’ growing sense of adulthood by trusting them to discuss difficult issues with maturity and respect. Explicitly naming their high expectations and trust in students—and allowing for fair consequences when those expectations are not met—may make teachers more approachable and trustworthy in their students’ eyes. Replacing traditional discipline with community problem-solving or restorative justice practices may help students to feel more secure and open in the class community. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016).
- 3. Sharing out:** After establishing trust in the classroom community, it is appropriate to ask students to share their written work aloud. Christensen & Watson (2015) describe a classroom ritual known as read-arounds in which every student shares a piece of writing. Classmates write “compliment sheets” for each student who has shared, providing specific positive feedback. This practice creates space for students

who have typically been silenced in the classroom—including queer women and girls—to have their voices heard but not singled out. Further, receiving positive feedback demonstrates to all students the value of their writing, speaking, and ideas. (Christensen & Watson, 2015, p. 240-3).

4. **Create girl-only spaces:** Some opponents of sex-segregated education point to the racial precedent of “separate and unequal;” others point to the founding ideologies of sex-segregated schooling that framed women as incapable of learning rigorous material and prioritized male achievement over female inclusion (e.g. Hedlund, 2004; Sadker et al., 2009). Certainly, sex-integrated classrooms are nearly possible to avoid in American public education. Yet, while coeducation offers academic and social benefits for boys, it tends to increase girls’ sense of risk and isolation (Sadker et al., 2009). Teachers can use non-instructional time to foster girl-only safe spaces (e.g. during breaks, lunch, and recess). These spaces should be open to all who self-identify as girls, and teachers may use this environment to position themselves as members of or allies to the LGBTQ community. Research (Pearson, 2016) reveals that girl- and woman-only spaces foster healthy identity development. Further, girls in sex-segregated environments demonstrate increased confidence and assertiveness when asking for help; they take more intellectual risks; they develop community and mutual support with other girls that carries over to coed class-time. The organization Warrior Sisters provides an excellent model of how to foster girls-only spaces. Warrior Sisters work with Eugene, OR schools in order to improve both sex-segregated and coed PE curricula for the benefit of all students. (Kommer, 2006; Pearson, 2016; Reay, 1990; Sadker et al., 2009, p. 264-86).

Rewriting Narratives in Explicit and Implicit Curricula

- 1. Provide windows, mirrors and door:** Successful curricula provide students with windows—insight into the world outside their personal experience—and mirrors—reflections of and engagement with their own identity. Bringing more queer and female authors into the classroom and naming their identities provides more windows and mirrors for students who are often limited to White, straight, male perspectives. Appendix F contains a list of resources from which teachers can find queer-inclusive curricula and literature, as well as a list of recommended books.
- 2. Break the taboo:** Many teachers believe that they can be neutral by remaining silent on tabooed issues, especially sex, sexual orientation, race, and gender. In other words, they refuse to teach about tabooed subjects due to the fear being “overly political,” “inappropriate,” or “indoctrinating” in the classroom. However, silence is not actually neutral; rather, silence enforces taboos and supports the dominant ideas of what is and is not acceptable and normal. Further, silence maintains the false narrative that injustice exists only in the past, rather than being a real and undeniable force that threatens human wellbeing every day. Rather than ignoring or shutting down student interest in these issues, teachers can facilitate age-appropriate discussions about sex and sexuality, gender roles, and derogatory language. Challenging students to approach these topics seriously and openly supports the message that teachers value student voices and trust them to engage in difficult interactions. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016; Rofes, 1989).
- 3. Amplify marginalized voices:** To encourage active participation from students who are most likely to be silent or passive in the classroom, teachers must consciously

make space and attention for those voices. Teachers may ask a student before class if they would like to share, giving the student time to prepare for a situation which may be uncomfortable. In other cases, it may be more appropriate for the teacher to ask to share a student's idea or writing with the rest of the class, thereby sharing that student's perspective without forcing them to draw uncomfortable attention to themselves. Giving students a longer wait time between asking a question and calling on a raised hand gives girls (who typically take longer to perfect their answer and gain confidence) a greater chance at speaking up. On the opposite end of the spectrum, teachers play an important role in helping male and/or heterosexual students to name and process their problematic dominant perspectives. However, these perspectives *cannot* be discussed in ways that dehumanize other students. Rather than placing blame or "calling out" inappropriate attitudes and speech, teachers should "call students in" and create meaningful dialogue by asking question such as: What do you mean by that? Would you say that in front of a [member of the marginalized group in question]? What are other ways you could express what you mean? How would you feel if someone said that about your or your [dominant] group? (Butler-Wall et al., 2016, p. 73; Paechter, 1998; Sadker et al., 2009, p. 99).

4. **Name it:** When discussing inequity, arm students with the accurate vocabulary. Words have the power to elucidate and disrupt systems of oppression. Naming patriarchy, sexism, heteronormativity, and homophobia as such allows students to recognize these oppressive systems in their lives and to shift away from the narrow view of individual bullying incidents or microaggressions. When teachers discuss

harassment in terms of systemic narratives and behaviors, more students are able to participate in the conversation without becoming defensive or disengaging. These discussions also validate queer women's and girls' experiences of oppression and dehumanization. Finally, students who have facility with the vocabulary surrounding oppression and inequity are better equipped to address such inequity throughout their futures. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016; Cruz & Groendal-Cobb, 1998).

Assignments and Readings

1. **Journaling:** Journals are an excellent tool for facilitating identity development, self-reflection, and social awareness alongside writing skills. Gender- and sexuality-related topics can be sensitive, difficult, and even embarrassing for students to discuss. It may not always be productive or helpful for students to voice their thoughts on these topics aloud. Instead, make it a class practice to keep unit- or year-long journals. Sadker et al. (2009) found that boys resist sharing emotional experiences out loud, but are more willing to write about “guilt, sadness, disgust, and fear” in journals (p. 130), thereby allowing for further awareness of one's own privileges and role in oppression. While students may be hesitant to fully record their thoughts, teachers can encourage genuine engagement by allowing students to dog-ear journal pages that they don't want anyone else to read, including their teacher. (Butler-Wall et al., 2016).
2. **Poetry:** Because of its flexible form, poetry can be more accessible to students who struggle with essay-writing. While classroom poetry is often dictated by rhyming rules and abstract vocabulary (the words onomatopoeia, allusion, simile and metaphor haunt many a learning writer), when embraced in its many forms, poetry

is an open-ended tool for self-expression and -exploration. (Christensen, 2009; Christensen & Watson, 2015; Lorde, 1984).

3. **Get personal:** One of the key characteristics of *The Leaping Lesbian* and other lesbian-feminist writings is the personal nature of their contents. Teachers cannot engage students in meaningful critical thinking without engaging their cultural backgrounds, life experiences, values, and passions. Units that lead up to student-led community activism are the most successful in this type of engagement. Possible projects include: writing personalized poems based on “Raised by Women” by Kelly Norman Ellis or “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon; creating a reading guide for the school that promotes works by gay and bisexual women; forming a GSA; writing editorials and letters to local newspapers and representatives about the issues that face queer women in their community. (Christensen, 2009; Christensen & Watson, 2015).

By self-evaluating, self-educating, building classroom community, restructuring assignments, and challenging the heteronormative patriarchal narratives of public education, middle grade language arts teachers can take full ownership of their power and responsibility in the lives of young people. The support and resources of language arts classrooms allows queer girls to engage in meaningful and positive ways with texts, developing a literacy of empowered queerness and femaleness.

Built from my analysis of social justice theory and education, large-scale policies and practices, historical lesbian-feminist print cultures, and heteronormative patriarchal narratives in popular middle grade books, these guidelines describe a research-based pedagogy from which queer girls can find empowerment, representation, and support in their identity development.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Above all else, I intend for this thesis and the associated guidelines to support teachers in inspecting the educational *processes* that ultimately shape their pedagogy and classroom presence. It is through the iterative processes of self-reflection, self-education, shaping classroom community, developing curricula, and building relationships that social justice work comes to fruition. It does not happen once; it happens an infinite number of times throughout an educator's career, even throughout a single day. To emphasize the importance of process, I have included an annotated lesson plan in Appendix F. In preparing oneself and one's curricula with the needs of queer girls in mind, teachers take the first steps to transforming their classroom and their role within it.

Limitations

As with any work surrounding politicized identities and their intersections, this work inevitably fails to speak to the experience of all queer women. What about Black bisexual women, transgender women living in poverty, or lesbian immigrants who do not speak English? These people may not find themselves in my work. Yet all identity-focused work faces such limitations. I have done my best to acknowledge the great diversity of young queer women living in the United States. Given the wide variety of interdisciplinary sources supporting my guidelines, it is probable that teachers using my guidelines will be able to better serve *all* queer girls and to adapt their teaching to the unique needs of those in their class at any given moment. These guidelines may not address the particular challenges that face students at the intersection of girlhood,

queerness, and every other social identity that an individual possesses. However, these guidelines recognize the humanity of a population of students that knows all too well what it means to be dehumanized, devalued, silenced, and ignored. This thesis is part of a much bigger work in progress, and I expect to refine and expand my guidelines as I put them to use and receive feedback from other classroom teachers.

Another area of further research is that surrounding queer women who teach. This thesis has only minimally addressed the teacher's own role in relation to systems of power and oppression; this limitation is the result of a narrow scope, not out of a lack of awareness of educators' identity struggles. There remains a need for continued research surrounding the experiences of queer female educators, the best practices of those working with such educators in order to support and empower queer female educators, and the practical actions and considerations needed for queer female educators in their navigation of gender and sexuality constructions.

Conclusion

The guidelines above grew from an interdisciplinary foundation. They grew out of history, theory, close literary analysis, and a critical reading of modern politics. I invite educators to grow alongside my guidelines while engaging with these interdisciplinary contributions, and that they will join me when I say: From studies of heteronormativity and patriarchy, we acknowledge how American women continue to live as second-class citizens, and we affirm queer girls' experiences of devaluation, dehumanization, and invisibility in American schools. From an analysis of modern educational legislation, practices, and environments, we see how queer girls continue to slip through the cracks of insufficient adult support. From the work of historical lesbian-

feminist writers and readers, we become hopeful that conscious, queer literacy can support queer girls in developing their sense of self, remembering their unmeasurable worth, and claiming the power to author themselves and the world around them. From analyzing popular middle school readings, we renounce all the forms of fictional violence against queer girls that inhibit their growth and learning: the marginalization, sexualization, maternalization, domination, ignorance, and exotification of queer girls in reading materials. To quote Mollie V Blackburn, with the correct support, every teenager “has the opportunity, over and over again, to author herself or himself into the world as someone empowered, which may result in the making of new worlds” (2002, p. 314).

Appendix A: Form Used for In-Depth Analysis of Texts

Book title and year	
Author	
Author gender and sexuality	
Gender of main character(s)	
Sexuality of main character(s)	
What appears to be the standard family unit/structure?	
What appears to be the standard relationship model (sexuality)?	
Is there any explicit mention of women's rights or LGBT rights?	
Are there any themes related to identity, coming of age, or self-knowledge?	
What roles do female and/or queer characters play?	
What roles to male and/or heterosexual characters play?	
General/miscellaneous observations	
Discussion questions and/or teaching notes	
Does the story take place in a real or invented world?	

Appendix B: Form Used for General Overview of Texts

Book title and year	
Author	
Author gender and sexuality	
Main character gender and sexuality	
Is there any explicit mention of women's rights or LGBT rights?	
Does the story take place in a real or invented world?	
General/ miscellaneous observations	

Appendix C: Suggested Discussion Questions for Popular Middle School Readings

- *The Lightning Thief*
 - What do you think of Percy's relationship with each of his parents (mother, father, step-father)? How does it look in comparison to your relationship with your own parents? Do you think Percy's family is healthy?
 - What is the importance of Percy being Poseidon's son? What if he were the son of a goddess instead? Would that change the family dynamic? How would it change the story (or not)?
- *The Giver*
 - What if Lily (Jonas's sister) were the Receiver instead of Jonas? Would the story be different in the protagonist were female? Why or why not?
 - Do you think that men and women have equal rights in *The Giver*? Why?
 - Why do all of the families have one mother and one father?
- *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*
 - A significant portion of Anne's diary focuses on love and romance. How does the courtship model of Anne's time differ from what today's teenagers experience? How might her experiences and values be different if she were alive today?
 - Is Anne a feminist? Why or why not?
 - Why did Anne value her journal so much? Is it helpful for young people facing oppression to journal? How so?
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

- How does Cassie's experience of racism differ from that of her brothers?

How do Mama's and Big Ma's experiences differ from those of Cassie's father and uncle? What is the role of gender in these differences?

- *The Outsiders*

- On page 35, Ponyboy says, "We try to be nice to the girls we see once in a while, like cousins or the girls in class; but we still watch a nice girl go by on a street corner and say all kinds of lousy stuff about her. Don't ask me why. I don't know why." Have you ever been catcalled or sexually harassed, or have you ever catcalled or sexually harassed someone else? How did it feel? Why do you think S.E. Hinton, a woman, included this passage when writing from a boy's perspective?

Appendix D: Tools for Teacher Self-Evaluation

The following tools can help teachers to privately evaluate their beliefs, practices, and background knowledge as it pertains to the education of queer girls. Engage honestly with the following exercises in order to evaluate any gaps in knowledge, unhelpful beliefs, and implicit biases. There are no “wrong” answers, so long as your self-evaluation helps to improve your teaching.

Test your knowledge of female historical figures.

Can you name 20 famous women? You cannot list athletes, entertainers, or women who are only famous because of their famous husbands. You may not use an internet search. Most students struggle even to name ten women that fit these criteria. How many can you name? How many are women of color? LGBTQ women? (Inspired by Sadker et al., 2009, p. 17).

Participate in Harvard’s Project Implicit at <https://implicit.harvard.edu>

To participate as a guest (your data serves self-educational purposes but does not contribute to the study), select your country on the lower left hand and select “Go.” On the next page, click “I wish to proceed.” You can then select the evaluations for sexuality, gender-career, and/or gender-science to receive evaluations of your implicit biases.

Use the following survey to self-evaluate your classroom practices.⁶

1. I can identify the hidden curricula and narratives in all texts I assign to students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

2. I spend more time managing boys' behavior than girls'.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

3. Middle schoolers are too young to talk or learn about sex and sexuality.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

4. Students do not use gendered/homophobic insults like fag or slut in my classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

5. Boys will be boys.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

6. I assume my students are straight unless I am given reason to believe otherwise.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

7. My students are constantly exposed to hidden curricula, both in and outside of school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

8. I evaluate assignments and activities for potentially harmful narratives and interactions before bringing them into my classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

⁶ This is a first attempt at forming a survey for teachers' personal use. Though I recognize the need for further development, it is useful for private self-evaluation as is.

9. *Boys and girls have different brain chemistry and therefore have different ways of learning.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

10. *When boys are mean to girls, it is usually because they have a crush on them.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

11. *I am aware of the gender, sexuality, and race of the author of the readings I assign.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

12. *I give my female students feedback the focuses on their thinking, academic vigor, and professional interests rather than their appearance or social actions.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

13. *Boys are naturally active learners and girls are naturally passive, quiet learners.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

14. *It is important for male students to improve their emotional intelligence and to practice caring for others.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

Questions 1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 14 represent positive teacher behaviors and beliefs that benefit queer female students. Questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 13 represent teacher beliefs and behaviors that are heteronormative, sexist, or otherwise harmful to queer female students. Transfer your responses into the following chart.

Question #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Your response														
Value	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	+

For a quantitative analysis, use your numbered responses. Add the values of all responses to questions **1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 14**; subtract all responses to questions **2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 13**. Your total will fall somewhere between 28 and -28, where higher responses indicate more helpful behaviors and beliefs about queer female students and lower responses indicate harmful behaviors and beliefs about queer female students.

For a qualitative analysis of your survey, note your correlation to negative versus positive behaviors and beliefs. With how many negative beliefs and behaviors did you agree or strongly agree? With how many positive beliefs and behaviors did you disagree or strongly disagree? What does this say about your assumptions about gender and sexuality?

Appendix E: Transcript from *It's Elementary!*

This discussion took place in an eight grade English class.

“Teacher: First of all, I think we should start talking about our story and share some of your curricular pieces. You were to write a one to two page response to the question of gay and lesbian inclusion in curriculum. How should we do it? At what ages? Do we not have things for young children? And I would like to get maybe five or six people to share these. You can read them, you can talk them, and then let’s start to respond and ask each other questions. Ok, go ahead.

Student 1: Everyone basically just assumes that everyone else is heterosexual and that it’s already understood. Because I know when I was four years old, like, I knew, I thought to myself, okay, there’s a boy, there’s a girl, and look at those people on TV. They’re doing what they do. But I know if I saw like two men on TV, I’d probably freak out or something. So I think it does need to be taught because...
[giggling from classmates]... What??

Teacher: No, no. Go, Marcus, go. So how should it be taught? I mean, are you too young? Should you not be reading Jack? Maybe somebody could talk about Jack from last year.

Student 2: My parents, like, especially my father, he was not too happy at all. He said that—and my brother, and then it became like this big family issue that was being talked about like over the dinner table. And they were like, oh your school is too liberal, they shouldn’t be teaching that in school, they’re sending the wrong message, and this and that. And this is like, it’s really hard for me sometimes kind of to figure out where I stand on an issue when you have all these people, like your family members...

My brother, my brother thinks it's disgusting. He outwardly says it's disgusting, it's a sin, it's nasty. He told me, like, one time—I don't remember what happened. I was with Juliana and we were laughing, and we were like, we were just laughing and sitting next to each other and he was like, stop acting like a bunch of this and that. He's like, that's disgusting, that's nasty, what's wrong with you? And he like scared the both of us!

Student 3: I don't know, it's just that kids, like—we hear all these different things from different places. People telling us different things, and school needs to give us all the facts, so we can decide on our own what to think, and you know, what to do.

Student 4: I just want to say that if kids are too young to be taught about sexuality then they're too young to be taught about heterosexuality. And you've gotta teach the equality and instill the equality from the very very beginning. If you're gonna read, you know, say you're gonna read Cinderella, you should read, you know, the one about when the two princesses go to the ball and they fall in love and live happily ever after. [Classmates giggling] What?

Student in background: Is there a book like that?

Student 4: Well there should be!

Teacher: I hear some people advocating that we give facts and let people form their own opinions and ideas and some people saying that you have to actually combat homophobia.”

From minute 20:28 to 23:27 in *It's Elementary*. Earlier in the film, there are examples of how teachers lead brainstorming sessions with students as young as first grade in order to determine and challenge their existing ideas about gay and lesbian issues.

Appendix G: Resources and Recommended Readings for Diversifying Curricula

Curriculum and Text Resources

- GLSEN's LGBT Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators
(<https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/creating-lgbt-inclusive-lessons>)
- GLSEN's Unheard Voices: Stories and Lessons for Grades 6-12
(<https://www.glsen.org/unheardvoices.html>)
- A Mighty Girl Books (<https://www.amightygirl.com/books>)
- The National Council of Teachers of English Book Series
(<https://secure.ncte.org/store/books/series>)
- Teaching Tolerance Perspective Texts and Lessons
(<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts>)
- The Zinn Education Project: resources on LGBT issues
(<https://zinnedproject.org/teaching-materials/?themes=lgbt>) and women's history
(<https://zinnedproject.org/teaching-materials/?themes=womens-history>)

Recommended Readings

The Miseducation of Cameron Post by Emily Danforth (2012).

Born Confused by Tanuja Desai Hidier (2002).

Poetry by Emily Dickinson.

Middlesex by Jeffrey Eugenides (2002).

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank (1956).

Poetry by Rupi Kaur.

Deliver Us From Evie by M.E. Kerr (1994).

Ash by Malinda Lo (2009).

**The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness (2008).

Empress of the World by Sara Ryan (2001).

Novels by Alex Sanchez.

**Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor (1976)

**Girl Walking Backwards* by Bett Williams (1998).

Novels by Jacqueline Woodson.

* Books marked by an asterisk should be assigned only in particularly mature classes who have experience identifying and disrupting heteronormative narratives. These works may have violent or upsetting content and must be carefully read for appropriateness on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix G: Annotated Lesson Planning Template

The following pages contain the lesson plan template used in the UOTeach graduate program. I have added notes prompting teachers to consider their gay and bisexual female students throughout the planning process. My annotations are italicized.

Date of Lesson:

Grade Level:

Title of Lesson Plan:

LESSON PLAN RATIONALE: Provide a rationale in which you explain the purpose and reasoning for the lesson plan. Why are you teaching this lesson? Why is it worth students doing? *What does this lesson offer to your queer female students? How will it disrupt heteronormative and/or patriarchal narratives?*

LESSON PLAN OBJECTIVES: What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do you expect students to acquire in this lesson? Stated as “students will be able to...” and/or direct references to standards.

Standard:

Learning Objective:

Social Justice Objective:

DURATION: How much time do you need to teach the lesson?

MATERIALS: List materials and attach handouts to the lesson plan. *Who is responsible for providing the materials? How will you eliminate the possibility that class materials will be associated with student status?*

PROCEDURES: Provide a detailed description of the lesson plan.

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

Guiding questions:

1. What kind of learning environment do you want to develop in order to establish respect and rapport, and to support students' engagement in learning? *To what extent do your students need to trust one another in order to successfully engage in the lesson? How will you build adequate trust? If the lesson deals directly with gender and/or sexuality, how will you set the tone so that these issues can be discussed seriously and open-mindedly?*
2. Are students made aware of the purpose and goals of the lesson? How? *Are students aware of how the lesson contributes to their community development or social awareness?*
3. How will you gather evidence and make sense of what students have learned? *If the lesson is discussion-based, how will you ensure that all voices are heard?*
4. In what ways will you connect new content to your students' prior academic learning and personal, cultural, or community assets during your instruction? *How will you connect the lesson to your students' identity development?*
5. What kind of anticipatory set will be used? How are the students' interests going to be piqued? *How will you engage the interest of girls as well as boys, LGBTQ students as well as straight students? What can you use instead of heteronormative and intensely gendered rhetoric?*
6. What kind of learning tasks actively engage students in the central focus on the learning segment? *Are these tasks equally accessible to students regardless of gender and sexual orientation?*
7. How do you scaffold the sequence of events?
8. How do you transition between activities?
9. What examples or modeling do you provide to support clarity of instruction? *Do you plan to use heteronormative examples, such as marriage or opposite-sex pairings? How many boys will you use for examples, compared to girls? Do you use traditionally male-gendered interests as models, such as sports? How can you incorporate examples of social activism and social justice?*
10. Are expectations for what students should be doing clearly conveyed?

11. What opportunities do student have to practice the learning? *Does this practice occur in groups? If so, how will groups be formed? Do male students have opportunities to more active practice than female students?*
12. How will you provide meaningful feedback to your students? *How will you ensure that your female students receive detailed, engaging, and meaningful feedback?*
13. How will you elicit and build on student responses in ways that develop and deepen content understanding? *Whose voices need amplification? How will you integrate the perspectives of quiet students into class understanding?*
14. How do you summarize instruction and review for the purpose of the lesson plan? *Whose work or ideas can be elevated as an example?*
15. Do you explain to students what to expect for tomorrow's lesson? *Does your treatment of future lessons paint your classroom as a safe, consistent environment?*
16. How will you use evidence from your instruction to examine and change your teaching practices to more effectively meet a variety of student learning needs? *How do you plan to get feedback about your practices? How will you know if you've been successful?*
17. Have you provided enough detail and included the materials for someone else to teach the lesson plan?

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE SUPPORTS: What opportunities are students given to use/practice the vocabulary of inquiry? Where do you use/practice the vocabulary of teaching? *How do you push all students to act as and be seen as experts?*

ADAPTATIONS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT: Based on your knowledge of the students, what adaptations will you use to encourage participation and engagement? *What have you learned about your female students that will help you to draw them into the conversation and make their voices heard? What aspects of identity development are currently at issue or of importance in your classroom?*

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

ASSESSING FOR UNDERSTANDING: What data (formal and informal) will be gathered and/or collected to assess the extent to which the students achieved the expected objectives of the lesson? How will you use evidence from your instruction to examine and change your teaching practices to more effectively meet a variety of student learning needs? How will you use evidence of what students know and are able to do to plan next steps in instruction? How will you identify evidence of and explain students' use of language that demonstrates the development of content understanding? *Do your methods of assessment provide equal opportunity to the different communication and engagement styles of your students?*

REFLECTION: What went well? What did not go well? What did you learn about your students? What did you learn about your teaching? For next time what will you adjust? Why? *Are there any subjects on which you need to educate yourself in order to do better next time? What roles did gender and sexuality play during the lesson?*

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